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# HISTORY OF BENGAL





# HISTORY OF BENGAL

Mughal Period  
(1526-1765 A.D.)

1338

by

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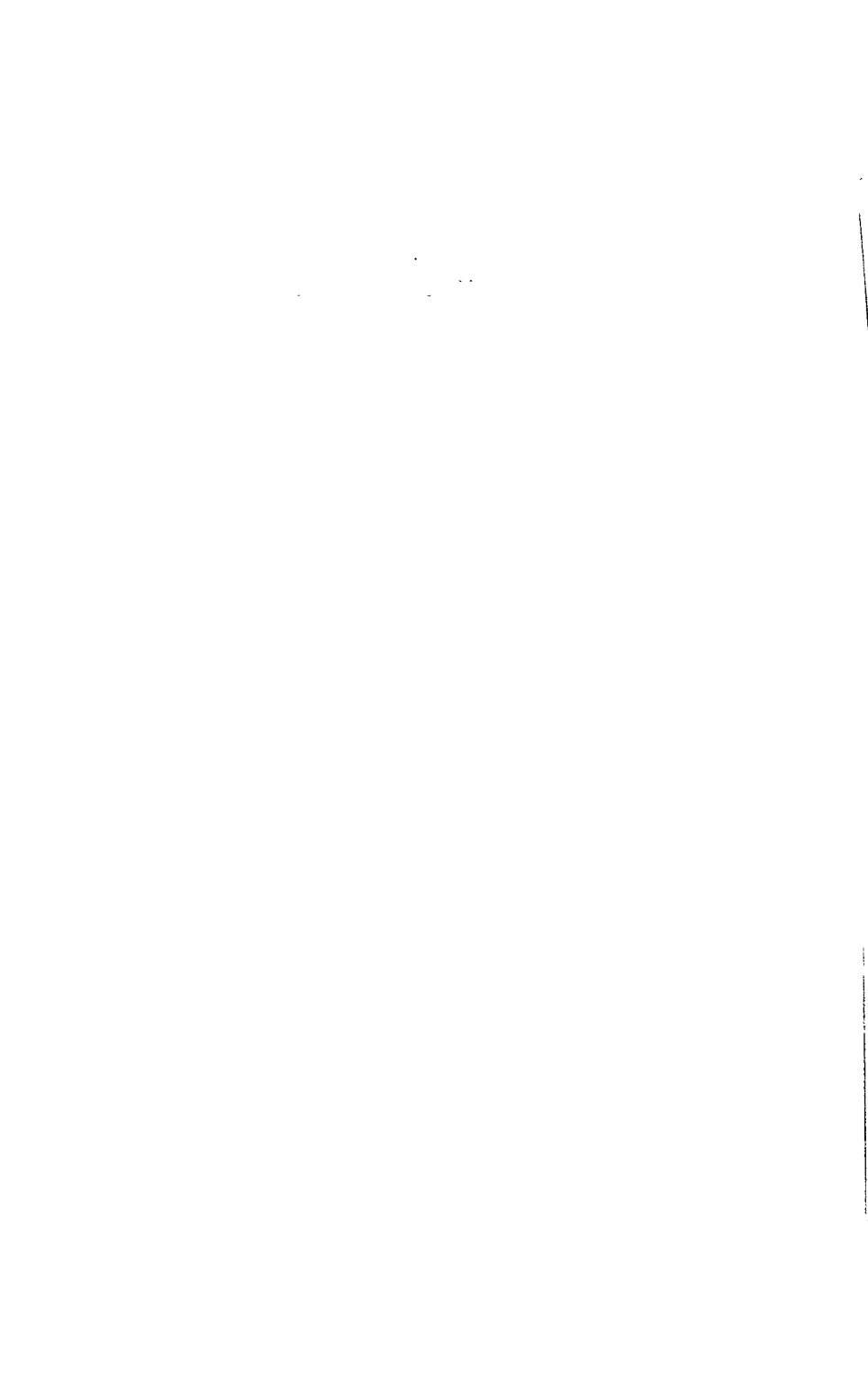
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*First Published in 1968*

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*To*  
**MY FATHER**



## PREFACE

THE aim of the present work is to give a comprehensive idea of the History of Bengal during the Mughal rule. Doubtless, politically, socially and economically, the period under review forms an important epoch in the history of the province. This period witnessed the emergence of certain new forces which greatly influenced the life of the people of the land.

An attempt has been made here to trace the political developments from Babur's invasion to the grant of Diwani to the English East India Company in 1765. While tracing these developments, emphasis has been made on the local political forces which opposed the imperialist designs of the Mughals at every stage. The role of the local landlords and frontier princely houses has been investigated as far as possible with minute details. In fact, local patriotism and chivalry of the Bengalis characterised the history of Bengal of the period which was no less significant than what it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The role of the Zamindars in the political and social life of the province has been reviewed.

The Nawabi rule in Bengal forms another distinctive period in the history of the province socially, politically and economically. In fact, this period can be called a novel period in the life of the people of the land. Of course, on this period we have a few valuable monographs like Dr. K. K. Datta's *Alivardi and his Times*, the author's *Career of Mir Jafar Khan* and Dr. N. Chatterjee's *Mir Qasim*. An attempt has been made in the present work to establish a link and to review the entire period afresh putting more emphasis on the rapid developments of the forces—political and economic.

A systematic account of the Maghs and Firinghi pirates, their piratical activities and their skirmishes with the government of the land has been given, although much remains to be told.

An attempt has been made, on a small canvas, to trace the origin and development of Mughal administration in Bengal. The subject has already been studied by Dr. T. Raychaudhuri in his work *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir*. But the later developments in the administration of the province under Mughal sway have been critically

examined in the present work. There remains still enough scope to make further investigation into the subject.

So far as social and economic conditions of Bengal during the period under review are concerned, just an outline of the subject has been given here. The subject is so wide that full justice can be done to it only if the enormous sources like the contemporary Persian chronicles, the contemporary vernacular literature, the travellers' accounts are worked upon and critically examined. Dr. K. K. Datta's *Studies in the History of the Bengal Sabah (1740-70)* is valuable in this regard so far as the later part of the period is concerned.

The last chapter of the present work deals with Bengal's naval traditions including the naval experiments and naval exploits of the Mughals. On this subject, a series of papers of mine (17 in number) appeared long ago in the *Hindusthan Standard*, the *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* and the *Journal of Letters* (Published by the Calcutta University). I have a plan to publish a separate monograph on this subject in future.

I take this opportunity of expressing my obligations to those who have helped me in the preparation of this work. I am thankful to Sm. Jayati Roy, M.A., who has greatly helped me in the work of collection of data particularly for chapters 2, 12 and 13. I am also indebted to Sri Ranjit Kumar Das M.A., who has helped me in preparing the chapters on social and economic conditions. I also acknowledge my debt to Sri Ranjit Saha of the Nababharat Publishers for the publication of this work.

*Calcutta University*  
*September, 1967*

A. C. ROY

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## CHAPTER I

### MUGHAL-AFGHAN HOSTILITIES FOR SUPREMACY IN BENGAL

The second battle of Panipat (1526) was a turning point not only in the history of India, but also in the history of Bengal. A new age and a new culture ushered in with the coming of the Mughals. The political supremacy of the Lodis was usurped by the conquering Chagtai Turks under the bold and inspiring leadership of Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire in India.

Battle of  
Panipat a turn-  
ing point

But the drama did not end with the seizure of the Delhi's throne by the Mughals, nor the difficulties in the way of Mughal conquest came to an end. The Afghans, though deprived of their throne, never accepted their defeat as a *fait accompli*. And the most difficult period of Mughal Afghan relations began after the battle of Panipat.

Bengal the last  
resort of the  
Afghans

Being dislodged from their upper Indian territories, the Afghans in large numbers migrated to the eastern provinces, particularly in Bengal where their fellow-kinsmen had been enjoying sovereign political power. Bengal was the last resort and refuge of the discomfited and discredited Afghans. In Bengal, Nasrat Shah, the contemporary of Babur, had been holding his sway and to whom the Afghans from upper India flocked and built up a strong anti-Mughal confederacy.

Till 1522 A.D., Bihar was included in the kingdom of the imperial Lodis. In that year the Lodi Governor of Bihar, Darya Khan Lohani declared his independence and the country from Patna to Jaunpur became virtually independent. Common interests bound the two states of Bengal and Bihar together particularly in view of the Mughal advance on the eastern provinces. There was another section of the Afghans, the Farmulis who were equally active in Bihar. While the Lohanis and Farmulis appropriated the country from Patna to Jaunpur, to Nasrat Shah of Bengal fell the districts north of the Tons river. As a result of new territorial acquisitions on the fall of the Lodi power, Bengal frontier was extended upto the river Son. Nasrat also conquered Tirhut over which he placed his brothers-in-law Alauddin and Makhdum-i-Alam. By erecting a fortress in Hajipur, on the

Birth of a new  
power in  
Bihar

Gandak-Ganges confluence, Makhdum assured Bengal's security against any attack from the west.

Having thus secured his position in Bengal, Nasrat Shah proceeded to build up an anti-Mughal confederacy with the Afghan chiefs of Bihar. His task was easy as a large number of Afghan chiefs flocked to the east after being driven out from their possessions in upper India by the advancing Mughals. Nasrat Shah, with a view to resist the Mughals raised camps on the frontier of Bihar. The Mughal prince, Humayun advanced towards Kanauj and Jaunpur. The Afghan chiefs, Marukh Khan and Nasir Khan Lohani were driven out from Jaunpur. The entire region from the Ganges to the northern coast of Gogra fell into the hands of Babur.<sup>1</sup>

At this stage, Babur made a halt. He wanted to ascertain the intentions of Nasrat Shah, whether he was friendly towards the Mughals or not. Babur's plan was to move towards Rajputana if he was assured of Nasrat's neutrality in his struggle against the Afghans. An envoy, named Mullah Muhammad Mahzab was despatched to the court of Nasrat soon after the battle of Khanwa in March 1527— with that purpose. For one year, the Mughal envoy was detained at the court of Bengal as Nasrat himself was vacillating between war and peace. Because, Nasrat was not certain about the assistance of his new Afghan allies nor he could correctly gauge the strength of the Mughals. The prolonged stay of the Mughal envoy at the court of Bengal, understandably, raised suspicion in the mind of Babur regarding the real attitude of Nasrat. Hence Babur decided to push forward. Being apprised of Babur's decision, Nasrat dismissed the Mughal envoy with suitable presents for the Mughal conqueror accompanied by his envoy named Ismail Mitah. Nasrat assured Babur of his loyalty.

Nasrat, in fact, kept his real attitude concealed both from the Mughals and his Afghan accomplices. But the veteran Afghan chiefs like Muhammad Farmuli and Bahar Khan Lohani were in no mood to accept Mughal advance unchallenged. They decided upon resisting Babur even without Nasrat's assistance. But just at this juncture, the death of Bahar Khan Lohani seriously weakened the very founda-

<sup>1</sup> *History of Gaur, II*, p. 151.

tion of the anti-Mughal confederacy. Moreover, Babur's victorious advance across the Ganges to Buxar completely disorganised the confederacy. On the other hand, Sher Khan Sur, one of the chief associates of the confederacy accepted a Mughal jagir and began to pursue his self interests at the cost of Afghan unity. Bahar Khan Lohani was the acknowledged leader of the Afghan resistance. But his minor son Jalal Khan Lohani was not in a position to continue the leadership. Hence the responsibility of reviving and revitalising the anti-Mughal front fell on the shoulders of Nasrat Shah. The latter was faced with a very difficult situation. For while on the one hand, he was to reorganise the anti-Mughal confederacy, on the other, he was to keep up his diplomatic alliance with the Mughals.

It is to be noted that, although the Afghans were determined to offer resistance to the Mughals, there was lack of unity in their rank. Faction fighting and scramble for leadership characterised the history of the Afghans in India and it was clearly in evidence since the time of the foundation of the Lodi Kingdom. The same picture repeated itself even at a time when they were being successfully dislodged from their holdings by the conquering Chaghtai Turks.

On the death of Bahar Khan Lohani, the Afghan chiefs became involved in mutual quarrels for leadership in eastern India. The leaders like Muhammad Shah Farmuli, Jalal Khan Lohani, Sher Khan Sur, Nasrat Shah—all failed to elect a leader amongst themselves and to work out a plan of resistance against the Mughals. This scramble for power created a complex situation in Bihar. The Afghan leaders were trying their fortune sometimes in alliance against the common foe, the Mughals and sometimes plotting against each other. First among them were Sultan Muhammad and his son Jalaluddin with their able protegee and adviser Sher Khan Sur. Later, the successes of Sher Khan led the aristocratic Lohanis and Farmulis to support the Lodi pretender Mahmud Lodi who recently came and occupied portions of Bihar. Finally, there was the crafty Bengali Sultan, Nasrat, who while secretly supporting the Afghans, pretended submission to Babur and never raised his finger openly against the Mughals. "It is against this background of tangled cross-current of rivalry and intrigue that the events of succeeding years have to be studied."

The Afghans, taking advantage of the pre-occupation of the Mughals with the Rajputs in Western India, marched across the Doab and took re-possession of Kanauj. This move of the Afghans

compelled Babur to advance again against the Afghans in the east with a strong determination to crush them. The campaign extended to both parts of North and South Bihar and during his march, Babur visited Chausa and Buxar. In his 'Memoire,' Babur noted under the date 29 March 1529, "I visited and rode over last years' encampment." Babur further noted under the date April 2 of the same year, "I landed opposite Chousa at the encampment of last years." He noted under the date 5 April, "Last year the army had halted a long time at a station opposite to Buxar and I crossed the river Ganges by swimming."

The disorganised Afghan resistance front was suddenly revitalised by the arrival of Mahmud, a Lodi pretender whose family prestige at once brought the Afghans under his banner. But the seizure of some portions of Bihar by Mahmud cost the Afghan confederacy the support of the Lohanis. Jalal Khan Lohani fled to Hajipur and implored the assistance of Nasrat Shah. Nasrat was put in a great dilemma. For, his support to Jalal Khan would have made Mahmud enraged and would have meant the end of the confederacy. While on the other hand, his intervention in favour of Mahmud would have made Jalal desperate and might have driven him into the hands of the Mughals for protection. Hence Nasrat detained Jalal at Hajipur with an assurance of intervention in his favour, while at the same time preparations were made for "Mahmud's grand military enterprise."<sup>1</sup>

Against Babur, Mahmud was joined by Nasrat, Sher Khan Sur, Biban Khan, Bayazid Khan, Kutb Khan and a Hindu landlord Basant Rai. In the beginning of 1529 the military enterprise against the Mughals was undertaken with great energy. Mahmud and Sher Khan continued their march along the two banks of the Ganges towards Chunar and Benares. Biban and Bayazid advanced towards Gorakhpur across the Ghogra. Under the instruction of Nasrat, the Bengali force at the command of Kutb Khan proceeded towards Bahraich with the object of occupying Lucknow.<sup>2</sup> Babur also continued his advance towards Bihar.

While the Afghans were on war-path, the imbecility and pussilanimity of Mahmud disgusted his Afghan colleagues. The news of the march of Babur un-nerved Mahmud and hence without advancing further, he fled towards.

Afghans' unity  
broke down

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Babur, III*, p. 652 ; *Riyaz*, p. 138.

Mahoba. This desertion broke unity in the Afghan camp. Sher Khan, although occupied Benares, came to terms with Babur. Jalal Khan Lohani also submitted to Babur near Buxar.<sup>1</sup> Other Afghan leaders, Biban and Bayazid courted defeat and Babur straightway advanced towards Bengal.

The turn of Nasrat came. He had been the main organiser of the anti-Mughal front and it was on the basis of his moral and material support that the different branches of the Afghans

Nasrat's critical situation

came upon a common platform with the single object of resisting the Mughals. All his efforts and his diplomacy proved a failure and he was deserted by all

his allies. He was now thoroughly exposed to the eyes of the Mughals and hence he was required either to prove his neutrality in the Mughal-Afghan hostilities or to take up arms in self-defence.

Babur's advance towards Bengal

In the month of April, 1529, Babur, from his camp at Buxar despatched his envoy accompanied by

Nasrat's envoy Ismail to Nasrat demanding the withdrawal of Bengali troops from the bank of Goghra.<sup>2</sup> Nasrat had no alternative than war. Still he delayed his answer to Babur's demand. His object was to give Biban and Bayazid time to assemble on the bank of Goghra. While at the same time, he instructed

Defeat of Bengalis

Makhdum to proceed to the confluence of Gandak and Goghra and to raise defences. Babur waited for nearly a month for Nasrat's reply. At last he sent

another envoy demanding a free passage across the Goghra and also prevented the Afghans from joining Mahmud Lodi near the river Son. Fighting seemed imminent. Babur despatched Shah Iskander to Bihar with three or four hundred soldiers. "The battle of Goghra (May 6, 1529), the third great battle Babur fought and won in India, was fought as much against those who championed the cause of the hereditary Lodi's claimant and an Afghan restoration, as against the ambitious and designing Bengal Sultan." Indeed, it was a great battle, and it lasted for 3 days. The Bengali forces—infantry and cavalry supported by war boats fought desperately but ultimately had to court defeat before the superior military skill and technique of the Mughals. The Bengali commander Basant Rai, fought bravely, wrought havoc on the Mughals and at last fell in the battle-field.<sup>3</sup> Jalal

<sup>1</sup> *History of Gaur, II*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Babur, III*, p. 674.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 674.



Khan Lohani personally waited on Babur and accepted Mughal vassalage.

The Afghan discomfiture was largely due to their internecine quarrels and divisions between the Lodis and Lohanis. Biban and Bayazid escaped capture by the Mughals and fled westward. They subsequently caused much trouble to the Mughals by their renewed attempts at Afghan restoration.

After the battle of Goghra, Babur set to work for the settlement of Bihar. Bihar had earlier been bestowed on Khan-i-Zaman Mirza, a competent general of Timurid stock. Babur now granted him royal insignias including the umbrella, a symbol of sovereign power. But after the flight of the Afghans across the Goghra and on account of military reasons, Khan-i-Zaman was transferred to Jaunpur. Junaid Barlas was transferred from Jaunpur to Chunar. Jaunpur and Chunar were turned into Mughal garrisons to prevent Biban and Bayazid from advancing eastward to rejoin the Afghan confederates. Shah Mahmud, the son of Maruf Farmuli received Saran district as a fief as well as a special dress, a horse and an allowance. Jalal Khan Lohani was reinstated in Bihar as a tributary vassal. He was allowed to recover greater part of his father's domains on a payment of one crore of rupees to the Mughal emperor. Sher Shah also submitted to the Mughal emperor and accepted Mughal vassalage.

A few days after the battle of Goghra, the Mughal envoy returned from Bengal with letters from Lashkar-Wazir-Husain Khan and the Shahzada of Monghyr (*History of Bengal, II, p. 156*) who intimated Nasrat's submission to the Mughal emperor on the terms of the latter whereby Babur promised not to disturb Nasrat's dependencies and Nasrat, on his part, agreed to withdraw his troops from the Goghra and not to assist Mahmud Lodi in any form.

However, the agreement with Babur could not remove Nasrat's apprehensions. As a matter of fact, the agreement neither assured territorial security of Bengal nor it was to the best interests of the Mughals. As both sides viewed one another with suspicion, another clash was inevitable. Hence, Nasrat set to work for reviving the anti-Mughal confederacy once more. The death of Babur in 1530 offered Nasrat the best opportunity. The Lohanis at heart were carrying a serious grudge for their loss in territory and prestige, while self-seeking Sher Khan Sur was looking forward for further advance-

Babur's settle-  
ment with  
Nasrat

Anti-Mughal  
Confederacy re-  
vived

ment of his position in Bihar. Hence Nasrat and Mahmud Lodi with little efforts succeeded in persuading Jalal Khan Lohani and Sher Khan to re-join the anti-Mughal confederacy. In June 1530 the Afghan aggression against the Mughals started afresh. The Afghans under the leadership of Mahmud Lodi and Sher Khan recovered Jaunpur from the hands of the Mughals and marched upon Lucknow. Biban and Bayazid, the two arch-rebels or shining patriots, were once more on the warpath “nominally in support of the puppet Sultan Mahmud Lodi, really to acquire whatsoever they could capture with their stout swords.”<sup>1</sup> But ultimately the Afghans suffered a crushing blow in the battle of Daurah. The incompetence of Mahmud Lodi and treachery of Sher Khan accounted for such discomfiture.<sup>2</sup>

The death of Biban and Bayazid in the battle of Daurah and Sher Khan's acceptance of Chunar as a jagir from the Mughals—practically dealt a death-blow to the Afghan confederacy.

For the moment the power of the Afghan was broken. According to Abbas Sarwani, the Mughal victory was largely due to the treachery of Sher Khan who deserted to the Mughal emperor with his followers at a critical moment. “Jealous of the power of Biban and Bayazid, and realising that the lack of unanimity was bound to prove fatal to the Afghan cause, he privately sent a message to the imperial general Hindu Beg, agreeing to withdraw his troops when battle was joined. This he did and the ruin of his friends resulted.”<sup>3</sup> The Mughal emperor inflicted upon the Afghans the crushing disaster they had never received for years. However, Humayun instead of chasing the Afghans and inflicting another blow upon them, when they were already demoralised, preferred to retrace his steps. Nasrat was left alone in the field to measure his strength with the Mughals to whom his diplomacy did no longer remain concealed.

Nasrat became now convinced that it would be futile to resist the Mughals single-handed. So he turned to Bahadur Shah of Gujrat, a powerful enemy of the Mughals. Nasrat sent an envoy, Malik Marjam to the court of Bahadur Shah with a proposal of defensive and offensive alliance. But unfortunately before anything was materialised in this direction, Nasrat breathed his last. However, the rumour of a coalition between

Nasrat's last effort

<sup>1</sup> Iswari Prasad, *Life and Times of Humayun*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Iswari Prasad, *Life and Times of Humayun*, p. 50.

Bengal and Gujrat, compelled Humayun to postpone his invasion of Bengal for the time being.

Nasrat's successor Ghiyasuddin Mahmud who ruled in Bengal from 1533 to 1538, had neither the competence nor the determination to offer any vigorous resistance to the Mughals.

**Failure of**  
**Ghiyasuddin**  
**Mahmud** He failed to work out successfully Nasrat's scheme of alliance with Bahadur Shah of Gujrat. It is to be noted that on the rumour of Bengal-Gujrat alliance

in 1531, Humayun postponing Bengal invasion proceeded to measure swords with the Gujrat Sultan. Hence a great opportunity was offered to reorganise another coalition and to strike the Mughal's during Humayun's engagements with Bahadur Shah. "There was still just a chance of reviving the Eastern coalition for neither Sher nor the Lohanis were at heart loyal to the Mughals. But Mahmud lacked imagination and failed to make a correct appraisal of the situation."<sup>1</sup> Rather Mahmud got himself personally involved in a long drawn conflict and hostility with Sher Khan in Bihar. This in turn completely sapped the very foundation of Afghan unity. Both Ghiyasuddin Mahmud and Sher Khan were bent upon pursuing their mutual struggle to the bitter end. In this contest, the Sultan of Bengal suffered repeated reverses. At last Ghiyasuddin Mahmud made desperate efforts to implore Humayun's assistance. But Humayun, instead of responding to the appeal of Ghiyasuddin, came to terms with Sher Khan by "recognising his (Sher Khan's) recent conquest of Bengal". The Mughal emperor was urged to proceed towards Bengal and he was assured of the expulsion of the rebel Afghans from the eastern provinces. Accordingly, Humayun resumed his march to Bengal and near Maner,

**End of Bengal's**  
**independence** the Sultan of Bengal joined the imperialists. The Mughal forces halted for sometime at Teliagarhi and wherefrom marched upon Gaur, the capital of Bengal which was meanwhile evacuated by Sher Khan Sur.

Within a short time, Ghiyasuddin Mahmud, the fugitive Sultan of Bengal died. With his death, political independence of Bengal also came to an end. After Sher Shah's victory over Humayun at Bilgram, Bengal was turned into a province of the Delhi Sultanate.

Thus ended the first phase of Mughal-Afghan hostilities for political supremacy in the eastern provinces. After initial success the Mughals not only suffered reverse but also ultimately lost Delhi's throne for more than a decade.

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 160.

For the loss of Bengal's political independence, certain factors may be mentioned. Firstly, Nasrat Shah only cared for his own interest and does not seem to have taken the challenge of the Mughals as seriously as it deserved. In the eastern provinces, from the point of material resources and extent of political power, Nasrat Shah occupied a very prominent position and in this he had no equal. His policy of disarming hostility and suspicion of Babur on the one hand and his secret support to the rebel Afghans on the other certainly ran counter to the national interest of the Afghans. His open support to Mahmud Lodi not only cost the anti-Mughal confederacy the support of the Lohanis but also pushed the latter into the arms of the Mughals. The task of reorganising the confederacy after the death of Bahar Khan Lohani as well as of maintaining his diplomatic friendship with the Mughals proved too delicate and difficult for Nasrat to handle skillfully. Secondly, there was absence of unity in the rank of the Afghans who rallied round the banner of Nasrat Shah. "Unless handled with extreme tact, flattered, cajoled and conciliated the Afghan warriors became sulky, insubordinate or frankly mutinous. As a consequence the personality of the prince became a factor of very great importance."<sup>1</sup> Nasrat's successor, Ghiyasuddin Mahmud lacked such personality and statesmanship which was essential not only to strengthen unity in the rank of the Afghans but also to offer combined resistance to the Mughals. His arrogance and wrong calculations made the situation extremely difficult for him, while on the other hand facilitated Sher Khan's rise to power in Bihar and Bengal. Mahmud failed to appreciate the necessity of implementing Nasrat's scheme of alliance with Bahadur Shah of Gujrat. With a lack of foresight, he entered into a bitter struggle with Sher Khan and thereby ignored the Mughals in order to overwhelm Sher Khan. "Little can perhaps be said in Mahmud's defence to whose utter incompetence, the extinction of Bengal's independence was in a large measure due. . . . But even without Sher as his rival, Mahmud's conduct of foreign policy, his imprudence and pusillanimity, would have sealed Bengal's fate."<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, Bihar, which was selected as a centre of resistance against

<sup>1</sup> Ishwari Prasad, *Life and Times of Humayun*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, pp. 164-165.

the Mughals, was in a chaotic state at that time. There continued for a long time a bitter struggle among the various branches of the Afghans, like the Lohanis, Isthuranis and Farmulis for supremacy in Bihar. This state of affairs certainly was not conducive to foster a strong sense of unity among them at the hour of peril. It cannot be doubted that by playing one section of the Afghans against the other, the Mughals succeeded in wresting some portions of Bihar and thereby weakening the resistance movement of the Afghans.

**Sec. II: The second phase of the struggle (1556-1575):** The success of the conquering Chaghtai Turks against the Afghan Sultans of Delhi brought political changes not only in Bengal but also in Orissa. Uprooted from Delhi and its neighbourhood, the Afghan rulers and the ruling aristocrats instead of moving westward, moved to the eastern extremity of the Lodi empire which was fixed at Bihar. Neither Babur nor Humayun, as we have seen, succeeded in pushing the Afghans further off into Bengal because Bihar was the easternmost limit of the Afghan power till the victory of Sher Shah over Humayun. Sher Shah for the first time realised the strategical importance of Bengal "with its proverbial wealth as a support and its equally proverbial bad climate" as a barrier against the Mughals and therefore a safest place for a quiet rule. Bihar formed the western border and the city of Patna on the conjunction of three mighty rivers like the Ganges, the Son and the Gandak, doubtless constituted a strong defence for Bengal.

After the expulsion of Hamayun from India, Sher Shah ascended the throne of Delhi and thereby once more brought Bengal under Delhi's rule. For about fourteen years, under Sher Shah and his son Islam Shah (1539-53), Delhi's rule was maintained effectively over Bengal. But the dissolution of the neo-Afghan power came with the death of Islam Shah and Bengal again broke away from Delhi's yoke till Akbar's nominal conquest of Bengal in 1575.

Confusion and anarchy followed Islam Shah's death leading to the seizure of the imperial throne by Mubariz Khan, Sher Shah's nephew who assumed the title of Muhammad Adil Shah and thus the Adil Shahi dynasty came into being.

**The Karrani dynasty in Bengal :** The dissensions and faction fighting among the Afghans in Delhi weakened seriously their opposition to the Mughals who were put to check for sometime by Sher Shah

Internecine  
struggle in  
Bihar

Bengal under  
the Surs

and Islam Shah. The Mughal-Afghan contest for throne of Delhi was finally decided in favour of the Mughals at Panipat (5th

November, 1556). The second battle of Panipat produced severe repercussions on the political history of India. Like other parts of India, Bengal was not immune from these political turmoil. Immediately on

Islam Shah's death, Bengal's Sher Viceroy Muhammad Khan declared his independence and assumed the title of Shamsuddin Muhammad Shah Ghazi. With this declaration, Bengal once again came to enjoy its independence, for the next twenty years. In his "desire to expand", Muhammad Shah Ghazi set out for Agra and Delhi and occupied Jaunpur on the way. But he was soon defeated and killed by Adil's general Himu at a place 30 miles east of Kalpi in December 1555.<sup>1</sup> This incident was followed by the return of the nobles of Bengal to Jhansi, opposite Allahabad. Here Muhammad Ghazi's son Khizr Khan, assuming the title of Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Khan, declared his independence and seized the throne of Bengal. The author of Riyaz-us-Salatin writes, that Shahbaz Khan was appointed Governor of Bengal by Muhammad Shah Adil. How far this is true, we do not know. Because during the reign of Islam Shah, Muhammad Khan Sur was the Sur Governor of Bengal. Upon the former's death, the latter declared his independence. So it is evident that Bengal never acknowledged Muhammad Shah Adil and hence the existence of Shahbaz Khan as a ruler of Bengal is difficult to prove. But this much can be presumed that Shahbaz was deputed by Shamsuddin Muhammad Shah to defend Gaur during the latter's absence from

M u h a m m a d  
S h a h G h a z i,  
G h i y a s u d d i n  
B a h a d u r S h a h,  
G h i y a s u d d i n I  
a n d G h i y a s -  
u d d i n I I

the province. It is probable that upon the death of Shamsuddin Muhammad Shah at Kalpi, Shahbaz Khan acknowledged his submission to Muhammad Shah Adil. But in the meantime Khizr Khan, supported by the nobles of Bengal defeated and killed Shahbaz Khan and ascended the throne of Bengal. Having consolidated his authority in Gaur, Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah alias Khizr Khan proceeded against Muhammad Shah Adil to avenge his father's death.<sup>2</sup> About this time, the political tempo at Delhi was running high. The discredited and expelled Timurid heir Humayun in the hands of Sher Shah, now reappeared in the political horizon of the country after the death of

<sup>1</sup> Dorn, *History of the Afghans*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 170.

Islam Shah and recovered the Punjab and Delhi. Upon the death of Humayun, Akbar succeeded to the Mughal throne in February 1556. Muhammad Shah Adil sent his general Himu against Akbar. Himu was killed, whereupon Muhammad Shah Adil in despair proceeded towards Bengal. But on the way, near Monghyr, after a hard fighting, Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah killed Adil in the year 1557. This victory gave Bahadur Shah the sovereignty of Bengal and a part of Bihar. He is said to have ruled these territories with reputation for three years more till 1560.<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the mutual fighting between Muhammad Shah Adil and Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah, Abul Fazl could well exult "at the wonderful fortune which occurred to the Mughal empire from the mutual contentions of its (Afghan) enemies".<sup>2</sup>

The Mughals, having consolidated their authority in Delhi and Agra, chased the demoralised Afghans in eastern India. The Mughals, thus, entered upon a career of conquest and expansion and proceeded as far as Jaunpur. The ruler of Bengal, Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah was defeated and plundered of his camp and baggage by the advancing Mughal General Khan-i-Zaman who was then posted in Oudh. Since his discomfiture, the Sultan of Bengal confined himself within his limit and tried to court Mughal friendship. Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah was succeeded by Ghiyasuddin II and Ghiyasuddin III. The latter continued friendly relations with the Mughals owing to his own difficulties at home. Then the sceptre passed into the hands of another Afghan family, the Karranis in 1564.

Our knowledge of this family and how and when it migrated into India is very meagre till we come across Taj Karrani to whom the Karrani family owed its prominence. The Karranis, better known in Afghanistan by the name Karlanis, are one of the branches of the Pathans. They hailed from Bangash (modern Kurram).<sup>3</sup> Stewart writes : "The Afghan tribe of Kerany had been peculiarly distinguished by Sher Shah and his son Salim (Islam Shah) who conferred on them handsome estates in Boujepore and the vicinity of Khasapore Tandah."<sup>4</sup> Taj Karrani was one of the chief officers of Sher Shah and after the death of Sher Shah, Taj Karrani was appointed Governor of South Bihar by Islam Shah.<sup>5</sup> He stood at the cross road of the decline of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Akbarnama*, II, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart says that Taj was appointed "Governor of Sambul", *op. cit.*, p. 172.

the Afghan empire in India and the rising of the Mughals under Akbar to political supremacy. Till that time Gaur or South Bihar did not come under Mughal occupation. Driven from Delhi by Ibrahim Khan, Muhammad Shah Adil established himself at Gwalior. But his authority rapidly declined. In spite of being sufficiently rewarded, Adil's adherents and officers of the army left Adil's court. Taj Karrani was one amongst the deserters and he proceeded as far as the Gangetic Doab where he set himself up. Adil chased Taj and defeated him at Chhibra. Mau (18 miles south of Farrukhabad). Stewart has narrated the incident thus "... on going to pay his respects at the court of Mahammad Adil, he (Taj) was so disgusted with the conduct of that infamous monarch and his vizier, that he resolved to abandon the service of so unworthy a master and retire to his personal estates. In his progress towards Boujepore, he seized a hundred elephants belonging to the emperor and a large sum of public money; the former he distributed amongst his brethern and relations and the latter he disbursed in raising troops to oppose Himu, the imperial vizier who came in pursuit of him."<sup>1</sup> However, being defeated by Himu, Taj Karrani turned eastward by way of Chunar and joined his brothers Imad, Sulaiman and Ilyas who held jagirs in Khawaspur Tanda (Tanda is about 15 miles south-east of modern Malda town). As Himu did not pursue Taj and his adherents, they remained unmolested. About this time a number of Afghan nobles, deserting the court of Adil, joined Taj Karrani. These new-comers brought along with them enormous wealth and men-at-arms which presumably strengthened the hands of the Karrani brothers in seizing the sceptre of Bengal ultimately. But very soon, the alliance of the Karranis with the Afghan deserters from the court of Gwalior brought the wrath of Adil upon them. Adil's general Himu by a surprise attack crushed the rebels in 1564, but failed to seize Taj and his brothers Sulaiman who escaped unhurt. Himu did not follow up his victory and thence marched back.

Soon the attention of the Karrani brothers was attracted to the state of confusion and anarchy due to the internecine struggle among the Afghan chiefs of South Bihar. Taj Karrani, by skilful manipulation succeeded in wresting some districts of South Bihar and thus laid the foundation of his family's future greatness.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Mukhazmi*, pp. 116-120.



political exploit of Taj was calculated to be the origin of a hostile power on Bengal's western frontier by the reigning Bengal's Sultan Ghiyasuddin III. With a view to keep Taj Karrani in good humour, Ghiyasuddin III hastened to welcome the former. Considering this an excellent opportunity, Taj assassinated Ghiyasuddin which led to great confusion in Bengal. In such confused state of affairs, it is said that Taj forged a 'farman' in Adil's name declaring that he had committed such act in accordance with Adil's permission. By this artifice, the uproar subsided and "the greater number of Omrahs joined the Karranis".<sup>1</sup> How far this incident is true, we do not know, but this much seems to be certain that Adil never had any actual political control over Bengal nor even any influence there and hence his farman could not have any effect on the nobles or people in Bengal. However, this much seems to be certain that Taj Karrani by a stratagem brought about the death of Ghiyasuddin III, captured the latter's elephants and treasures and wrought himself upto sovereign power in Gaur in 1564. The provincial anarchy was stamped out by the new dynasty. Thus a new power came into being which under its able rulers like Sulaiman and Daud not only became a dominating power in eastern India from the Kutch frontier to Orissa and from the river Son to that of the Brahmaputra, but also proved a strong bulwork against Mughal expansion in that region for sometime. Besides, the spirit of resistance to the Mughals which this family infused into the Afghans, made the Mughals pay a high price to crush.

Deputing his brother Sulaiman to look after the administration in Gaur during his absence, Taj Karrani left for Hajipur to bring to submission the Kokars. Negotiations having failed, Taj resorted to coercion. The Kokars were routed but the Isthurians, another branch of the Pathans, challenged Taj. Taj was defeated and died of his wounds within a year of his gaining the throne of Bengal.

**Sulaiman Karrani** : On the death of Taj Karrani, his brother Sulaiman Karrani stepped into the vacant throne of Bengal and ruled for eight years (1565-72).<sup>2</sup> He assumed the title of Hazrat Ali and his first act was to transfer the capital from Gaur to Tanda.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> According to Riyaz-us-Salatin, Sulaiman ruled for 9 years, while according to Blochman, he ruled for 2 years.

Sulaiman Karrani had a favourable start. With the disappearance of the various branches of the Sur Royal house, Sulaiman had no serious rival in eastern India. He was an able ruler and equally an able conqueror. His main object was to maintain peace internally so as to collect revenue, to promote happiness of his subjects and in this direction he achieved great success. The policy he pursued in increasing his revenue, territories and above all in maintaining peace has been wrongly coloured by Abul Fazl as "hypocritical manner and fraud". He strengthened his arms by incorporating in his army a large number of Afghan veterans and the survivors of Sher Shah's grand army who having been expelled from Delhi, Gwalior, Allahabad and Oudh by the Mughals, joined the standard of Sulaiman in Bengal. Further, he recruited best fighting elephants numbering one thousand and which constituted a fitting challenge to the Mughals. With these newly recruited troops, Sulaiman made his position irresistible in north-eastern India.

Sulaiman was equally successful in his foreign relations. In this direction, he followed a policy of conciliation and conquests.

He clearly understood that unless the Mughals on his western border were made to believe in his loyalty to them, it would not be possible for him to extend his army in other three directions. So he took extreme care to avoid giving the least offence to the Mughals. Accordingly, he kept Akbar's Governors like Khan-i-Jaman and Khan-i-Khannan in good humour by means of costly presents. Even he made a show of submission to the Mughal emperor by acknowledging the latter as his suzerain, by reading 'Khutba' in Akbar's name and never sat on the throne nor struck coins in his name nor assumed any royal title, although "he behaved to others with a dignity of a king".<sup>1</sup> For the success of his reign, credit should be given to his wazir Ludi Khan who possessed keen political insight, wise moderation and tactfulness. To disarm the hostility of the Mughals, Ludi Khan initiated a meeting between Sulaiman and the Mughal Governor Khan-i-Khannan Munim Khan at Patna where Ludi Khan made Sulaiman agree to read khutba and strike coins in the name of Akbar. It is said that Sulaiman was instigated by some of his adherents to make the Mughal governor prisoner, but ultimately the influence of Ludi Khan prevailed. Munim Khan left the Afghan camp unhurt accompanied by his few attendants.

Sulaiman's  
foreign policy

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<sup>1</sup> Riyaz, p. 153; Stewart, p. 175.

After this, Sulaiman's son Bayazid visited Munim Khan and offered him costly presents.<sup>1</sup> Stewart writes, "soon after Sulaiman had taken possession of Bengal, he despatched an intelligent agent with many valuable presents to the court of the emperor Akbar with assurances of his great respect and attachment; which conduct highly gratified and flattered the emperor and contributed to the ease and comfort of the inhabitants of Bengal who were at that period very apprehensive of a visit from the imperial arms."<sup>2</sup>

Sulaiman having rendered himself completely master of Bengal and Bihar, excepting the fortress of Rhotas, marched at the head of a large army in 1565-66 and invested that fortress. The siege continued for a few months. Upon the emperor Akbar's arrival at Jaunpur, Futteh Khan, the Governor of Rhotas implored his assistance, promising to deliver up the fort to any of the imperial servants who might be sent for that purpose. Akbar, immediately sent off a chosen detachment to raise the siege. Sulaiman, fearful of encountering the imperial arms, retreated to his kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

Up to the middle of the 16th century, Orissa had been a Hindu country both in its royal house and in population. The river Mantreswar was the dividing line between Muslim kingdom in the north and Hindu Orissa Kingdom in the south. It is said that till then not a single Muslim inhabitant was there in Orissa. But a change came in with Sulaiman Karrani's invasion in 1568 which not only supplanted the Hindu royal house but also led to a huge influx of Muslims into Orissa. Islam got a firm footing in Orissa after Akbar's victory over Daud Karrani in 1575, although now and then the local Hindu chiefs raised their heads and enjoyed independence temporarily.

A decade before Sulaiman's invasion, Orissa's royal house was thrown into confusion due to a series of palace-murders and rapid changes in the head of the State. The last two kings of Orissa's Gajapati dynasty, Purshottam Dev and Prataprudra Dev were followed by weak successors "under whom that kingdom became a scene of baronial revolt, palace-murders and usurpations of the throne which tempted Muslim invasion from Bengal".<sup>4</sup> The successors of Raja

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 477-79.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 183.

Prataprudra Dev were for all practical purposes, in the grip of their prime minister Mukund Dev. He assumed the role of King-maker. He caused the poisoning of the Raja Chakra Prataprudra by the latter's son Narasingh Jena. Again Narasingh was murdered and replaced by his brother Raghuram Jena by Mukund Dev. At last in 1560-61, the King-maker threw off the mask, stepped into the throne and started his own rule. Although an usurper, Mukund Dev succeeded in restoring peace and order with an iron hand.

About this time, Ibrahim Sur, the rival of Adil, being dislodged from Delhi by the Mughals, came down to Orissa and sought asylum in the court of Mukund Dev in the year 1560. The latter granted the former some lands for his subsistence. Envoys from the Bengal Sultan as well as from the Mughal emperor came to Mukund Dev's court for surrendering the fugitive Afghan Sultan. To the former, Mukund Dev refused repatriation. But he welcomed the imperial embassy, swore allegiance to the emperor and promised to hand over the fugitive Afghan prince in case Sulaiman Karrani betrayed his allegiance to the emperor. As a step for preventing the Sultan of Bengal from marching into Orissa, Mukund Dev advanced as far as to Satgaon (Hughli) in South Bengal and raised a military post there.

Mukund Dev's refusal to surrender Ibrahim had already displeased Sulaiman and now the Orissa Chief's incursions into South Bengal exhausted Sulaiman's patience. He was awaiting an opportunity to punish Mukund Dev. Akbar's pre-occupation with the Chittor affairs in the winter of 1567-68, offered Sulaiman the desired opportunity as it would deprive Mukund Dev of the emperor's assistance. Sulaiman sent an expedition immediately to Orissa under his son Bayazid. The Bengal army advanced through the forests of Chhota Nagpur and Mayurbhanj. Instead of facing the invaders personally, Mukund Dev detached his army under two of his officers, Chhota Rai and Raghubhanja. They proved traitors, joined the Bengal army and turned to attack their royal master. This unexpected turn of events completely unnerved Mukund Dev and he took shelter in the fort of Kotsama. In the course of the fight that followed, both Mukund Dev and Chhota Rai were killed, whereupon a general of the Orissa army Ramchandra-bhanja proceeded to seize the vacant throne. But soon he fell into the trap of Sulaiman and lost his life. By a stratagem he captured Ibrahim Sur and killed him too. Thus with the fall of the royal house of Orissa, it passed into Muslim possession (1568).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 183.

Having rendered himself master of the capital of Orissa, Sulaiman detached an Afghan army under Kalapahar (alias Raju) to ransack the temple of Jagannath which was noted "for vast treasures accumulated in it". Dorn writes : "It (the city of Puri) was the strongest fortress of the infidels into which the Muhammadans had not yet set a foot. The town was surrounded on four-sides with temples and a deep water, to cross which, Sulaiman mounted the Afghans upon 300 elephants."<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim army advanced with ease as there was none to oppose it. The Orissa royal house had already fallen and no outpost on the way was strong enough to offer the least resistance.

Niamatullah's  
accounts

Further, the people of Puri themselves "were so lulled into security by centuries of freedom from foreign attack on their holy city that they disbelieved the first report that the Muslims were coming; for they said, 'is there any one so mighty and powerful to do any harm to the worshippers of our God ?' But the rumour of Muslim army's advance caused panic in the Hindu population. The female part of the inhabitants of the town, ornamenting themselves in a pompous way, concealed themselves behind the different temples of Jagannath without thinking of flight. . . when a body of Muhammadans rushed into that temple and took the women prisoners, they were struck with the greatest surprise."<sup>2</sup> Niamatullah writes : "Sulaiman dismantled the temple of Jagannath and ordered the image of Krishna adorned with many kinds of ornaments and jewels and all its limbs made of gold and its two eyes formed by diamonds—to be broken into pieces and thrown into a filthy place. Seven other idols of gold of various shapes, placed around it and each weighing five Akbari maunds, were brought away by the raiders. . . . There was none among the partakers in this campaign who did not bring away as booty one or two gold images."<sup>3</sup> But "the most surprising of all", observes Niamatullah, "is the fact that all those who had co-operated in sacking those idols, died within the space of a year, reduced to misery and distress."<sup>4</sup>

There is a story of Rajah Mukund Dev and Kalapahar in Salimullah's *Tarikh-i-Bangala* which runs thus, "in the reign of the emperor Akbar, Kalapahar an ameer from the time of Babur, who was

<sup>1</sup> Dorn, *History of Afghans*, II, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Makhzam*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>4</sup> Vide Dorn, *History of Afghans*, p. 181.

a brave soldier and reputed to have the power of working miracles, invaded Orissa by the road of Jharkhand, at the head of twelve thousand cavalry. The reigning prince of the country at that time was Rajah Mukund Dev, whose custom it was to hold his court for six months and spend the rest of the year in sleep. During the latter time, whoever presumed to disturb him when asleep, was sure to be put to death. When the Rajah heard of the approach of Kalapahar, he built the fort of Barabatty and there shut himself up and slept according to custom. Kalapahar having defeated his armies, subdued all the country and took prisoner the Ranee, his wife with a great booty. He then besieged Barabatty but no one yet dared to awaken the Rajah. At last some of his servants thought of the expedient of making the hautbois perform an air which roused him from his lethargy and informed him of his situation, but all opposition was now in vain and he fell like grass before the edge of the conqueror's sword. From that time Orissa was annexed to the empire and received into the pale of Islamism."<sup>1</sup>

After his brilliant success, Sulaiman left a deputy to govern Orissa and returned to his capital in 1569. Sulaiman's Orissa campaign led to the establishment of an Afghan colony in that country. Stewart writes that while Sulaiman Karrani was engaged in his north-eastern adventures, the people of Orissa rose up in arms and drove away the Muslim governor. However, upon Sulaiman's return to his capital, he detached a force to recover his authority in Orissa.<sup>2</sup>

Sulaiman Karrani next turned his attention to the Hindu Kingdom of Kuch Bihar in the extreme north of Bengal, where half a century before the Karranis usurped the throne of Bengal, a new dynasty under Biswa Singh had come into existence. The Kuch dynasty took its origin to the fall of the Hindu Kingdom of Kamtapur. In the opinion of Edward Gait, Biswa Singh assumed his independence in 1515 and called himself Kamateswar with a view to continue the traditions of the earlier dynasty of Kamtapur. Biswa Singh was a vigorous ruler and a great conqueror and extended the frontiers of his kingdom far and wide. But he always took care to keep the Bengal Sultans on his south and the Ahom Kings on his east in good humour.<sup>3</sup> After the death of Biswa Singh in 1540, his eldest son

Sulaiman's  
Kuch  
campaign

<sup>1</sup> *Tarikh-i-Bangala*—Eng. tr. by Gladwin, pp. 145-146.

<sup>2</sup> *Riyaz*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Dacca Univ., History of Bengal, II*, p. 184.

Malla-deo or Naranarayan ascended the throne. Naranarayan's younger brother and the general of the Kuch army, Sukladhwaja further extended the Kuch kingdom. A series of victories in the north-eastern tract within a space of a few years, encouraged the Kuch king to march into the dominions of Sulaiman Karrani in 1568. But the tide of fortune in his favour rolled back. The Bengal General Kalapahar carried all before him and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Kuch troops commanded by Sukladhwaja and thus sullied the latter's unbroken martial record. The Afghans defeated Sukladhwaja and made him a prisoner. "The Muhammadans ascended the Brahmaputra as far as Tejpur but they made no attempt to take permanent possession of the country and returned to Bengal after demolishing the temples at Kamakhya, Hajo and other places. All local traditions point to the redoubtable Brahman renegade and iconoclast Kalapahar as the leader of the Muhammadan army.<sup>1</sup> In fact, not an inch of territory was acquired nor was any promise of tribute exacted from the vanquished Kuch king. Hence to all intents and

Results

purposes the brilliant campaign of Sulaiman Karrani was a failure<sup>2</sup> and recognised as such by Abul Fazl who writes, "the ruler of Kuch did not pay his respects to the Hakim of Bengal and Sulaiman Karrani proceeded to make war upon him and returned after failure".<sup>3</sup> However, a few years later, political expediency necessitated the release of the Kuch prince as the Bengal Sultan felt the necessity of having a strong friend on Bengal's northern frontier in view of the inevitable hostility with the Mughals who were gradually advancing towards Bengal. According to the *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, Sulaiman had proceeded as far as the gates of the Kuch capital, but the news of a rising in Orissa compelled him to withdraw with his army.<sup>4</sup>

Sulaiman died in October 1572. After the Kuch campaign, Sulaiman did not leave his capital any more and where he spent the rest of his life in piety and strict observation of the night and morning prayers without allowing himself to deviate in the least degree from the ordinances of the Muslim law. "It is related of him that he held every morning a devotional meeting in company with 150 Shaikhs.

Sulaiman's last days

<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> S. Bhattacharyya, *Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Akbarnama, III*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Riyaz*, p. 153.

and Ulamas after which he used to transact business during fixed hours and that this practice influenced Akbar's conduct."<sup>1</sup> It was in the reign of Sulaiman Karrani that a golden mosque was built in Old Malda.<sup>2</sup> No coins bearing Sulaiman's name have upto now come down to us.

**Bayazid Karrani** : Sulaiman Karrani was succeeded by his son Bayazid. A proud, and self-willed youngman, Bayazid, unlike his father, turned the Afghan chiefs, who were the staunch supporters of his father, against himself by his insolence, arrogance and cruelties. His attempt to banish the Afghan veterans from Bengal at last forced the latter to a conspiracy against Bayazid. As a result, he was murdered by Hansu, the nephew and son-in-law of Sulaiman. According to the *Muhtkhab-ul-Tawarikh* (Eng. tr. Vol., II, p. 167) Bayazid ruled for five or six months. According to the *Makhzam-i-Afghana* he ruled for eighteen days, while according to the *Riyaz-us-Salatim* (p. 153) for one year.

**Daud Karrani** : According to the *Riyaz* and the *Makhzam*, two days after the assassination of Bayazid, Daud Karrani, another son of Sulaiman Karrani collected a force and marched against Hansu who threw himself upon the protection of his accomplices, Kutlu and other Lohanis. At this juncture, the Lohanis, in order to save their skin, delivered up Hansu to Daud to be executed by the latter.<sup>3</sup> There is another version of this episode in the *Tarikh-i-Daudi*, according to which Sulaiman's Wazir Mian Ludi Khan got hold of the person of Hansu by an artifice, killed him and placed Daud on the throne.<sup>4</sup>

Daud mounted the throne, assumed royal titles and struck coins in his own name. He inherited a vast treasure from his father and a strong army.<sup>5</sup> This acquisition of wealth and possession of a large army puffed him up with vanity and he considered himself strong enough to cast off his allegiance to the emperor Akbar, the allegiance apparently and of course prudently maintained by his predecessors. "Although the well-wishers dissuaded him from this policy and gave

Daud's accession

Daud's wrong policy

<sup>1</sup> *Riyaz*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ravenshaw, *Gaur, its Ruins and Inscriptions*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Riyaz*, p. 153 ; Dorn, *History of Afghans*, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Vide Elliot, *History of India*, IV, p. 510.

<sup>5</sup> "He (Daud) had 40,000 well-mounted cavalry and 3,300 elephants, and 140,000 infantry, consisting of musketeers, mach-lockmen and rocketeers and archers and 20,000 pieces of ordnance, most of which were battering guns and many cruisers and other implements of war, which he had ready and in store"—(*Riyaz*, p. 154).



him good counsel, he did not listen." This foolish act of Daud and his eagerness of demonstrating his prowess very soon brought him into the long expected clash with the Mughals. He acted foolishly in another way. A head-strong sensual youth sunk in drunkenness and low-pleasures, Daud raised a host of enemies at home by wantonly insulting the Afghan veterans and treacherously murdering every kinsman who might have had the slightest prospect of the throne. Even Mian Ludi Khan to whom Taj and Sulaiman Karrani owed too much for their success, and whom Abul Fazl had admired as "the rational spirit of the country" was not spared. Instigated by some selfish nobles like Kutlu Lohani and Gujar Karrani, Daud brought about a fatal breach with Ludi Khan by murdering the latter's son-in-law and Taj Karrani's son Yusuf. Niamatullah writes that this breach between Daud and Mian Ludi Khan led to the disruption of the Karrani house and in consequence the establishment of the Mughals in Bengal.

While Daud was busy in settling his affairs in Gaur, Gujar Khan, a general of the Bihar Afghans, set up a son of Bayazid in Bihar. Being apprised of this move of Gujar Khan, Daud detached Mian Ludi Khan at the head of an army to punish Gujar Khan and to bring Bayazid's son dead or alive. About this time the Mughal general Munim Khan had advanced as far to the border of Jaunpur and Bihar to take possession of Bihar under Akbar's order. Ludi Khan, an estranged general, came to Bihar to meet another equally estranged general and presumably their meeting could never deliver any good to Daud, the man responsible for their estrangement. Understandably, both of them came to terms and bought off Munim Khan with presents and promises of loyalty.<sup>1</sup> Upon the advice of such a turn of events in Bihar, Daud hastily proceeded from Bengal to crush Ludi. He won over the deserters to his side. In great precipitation, Ludi Khan escaped to Rohtas and appealed to Munim Khan for protection. The Mughal General could not miss this opportunity and accordingly despatched a Mughal army to assist Ludi Khan "with sword and counsel",<sup>2</sup> while he himself moved forward so that Ludi could come and wait on him and the affairs of Bengal and Bihar could be easily disposed of.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart writes that according to the articles of peace, the Mughals agreed to retire from Bihar provided the King of Bengal should pay a sum of two lakhs of rupees in cash and suitable presents to the Mughal emperor. (p. 177.)

<sup>3</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 98.

Meanwhile, upon advice from Munim Khan, emperor Akbar sent Raja Todar Mal at the head of a large army to strengthen the hands of Munim Khan then stationed in the outskirts of Bihar. Akbar issued an urgent order calling upon the Mughal officers and fief-holders in Bihar to act harmoniously together and not to deviate from the instructions of Munim Khan. Munim Khan marched into Bihar upto Trimohani (the junction of Gogra and Ganges, about 12 miles north of Arrah town). Within a short time, Todar Mal arrived with the reinforcements and the command of the whole army was arranged as follows : "The centre was under the Khan-Khanan; Mujnun Khan, Baba Khan and others had charge of the right wing, Muhammad Quli Khan Barlas, Qiya Khan, Ashraf Khan and others were in charge of the left wing. The Khan Alam, Mirza Ali and others were with the vanguard. When the Raja had mustered the army, Lashkar Khan and many of the Khan Khanan's servants crossed the river."<sup>1</sup> The Afghans in their newly constructed fort in front of the royal army took to flight without coming into skirmish. The Mughals who were advancing to make a junction with Ludi Khan, cried a halt at this moment, because news came from the Mughal Commandant who had gone forward to meet Ludi to the effect that the latter had declined to receive assistance from the imperialists as he had himself reconciled with Daud who was now ready for battle and had with him a large army.<sup>2</sup>

What actually happened was that Daud in fear of Mughal advance thought it prudent to reach an understanding with Mian Ludi Khan. Accordingly, he sent a message to Ludi, saying "you are in the place of Sulaiman, if on account of love to this family you have become angry with me and gone off, you have done your duty, and I am not displeased with you. In every undertaking I ask assistance from you. At this time, when the sublime (Mughal) armies have come against me, do you also from the excellent good will which you have always shown, gird up the loins of energy for battle, I make over to you the army, the treasures and the park of artillery".<sup>3</sup>

The message of Daud Karrani has the ring of the message sent

Daud's reconciliation with Ludi

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Vide, *Akbarnama*, III, p. 99.

by Nawab Sirajuddaulah of Bengal to his Sipah-Salar Mir Jafar in the battlefield of Plassey in 1757. While in the latter case, Mir Jafar replied to his royal master like a diplomat with the tongue in the cheek, in the former case, Mian Ludi with all earnestness responded to the call of his master and accordingly dismissed the Mughal envoys from his camp and "in his ill fortune came face to face with the Mughal army, built a fort and engaged in war".<sup>1</sup> Fighting ensued on the bank of the Son. But Ludi's gallantry excited the jealousy of Daud who under the tuition of Kultu Lohani and Gujar Khan, seized the person of Ludi by an artifice and had him murdered. Abul Fazl narrates this incident as follows, "when Ludi Khan had been reassured and was carrying on the war with energy, Daud followed him up and arrived at the house of Jalal Khan. He sent a message to invite Ludi Khan and Phul, who was Ludi's wakil, to come and see him, as he had various things to say. Ludi went with all confidence—but Phul did not go saying that the invitation had not a good odour. At first Daud treated Ludi with respect. After that he retired, Kutlu and others came and were about to arrest him. Ludi's servant who had his sword, when he saw that there was to be treachery, aimed a blow at Kutlu and was himself cut to pieces. Ludi was arrested and a disturbance arose among the Afghans. All the officers agreed that he (Ludi) should be put to death. Daud asked him, what he ought to do. He (Ludi) replied, 'Do not injure me in my dignity and honour, now that at the instigation of short-sighted men I have fallen into this evil, the proper thing for me is that I obtain repose in the privy chamber of annihilation'."<sup>2</sup> Dissension broke out in the Afghan camp which destroyed the chances of opposing the Mughals with success. Meanwhile the Mughal army approached the neighbourhood of Patna where Daud shut himself up. The imperial army arranged the batteries and invested the town.

Both sides exhibited equal courage and determination. But as the river Ganges was on one side of the fort of Patna, abundant provisions reached the besieged Afghans. The fort was also well-equipped with war ammunition, treasures and provisions giving confidence to the Afghans.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Vide, Akbarnama, III, p. 100.*

Hence, Munim Khan sent word to Akbar to come down to Bihar personally. Accordingly, the emperor arrived at Patna with a large fleet carrying guns and war elephants on 3 August 1574.<sup>1</sup> Having investigated the situation, the emperor realised that capture of the fort of Hajipur wherefrom the Afghans got a regular supply of provisions, would make Patna untenable. On 6 August Hajipur was taken possession of by the Mughals. This sealed the fate of Patna.

On the day Hajipur was occupied, Munim Khan sent a message to Daud, saying "He (Daud) should not be the cause of the shedding of blood of so many men and the ruin of the property and honour of so many. . . why did not come to himself and why did he did attach himself to the saddle straps of God-given fortune".<sup>2</sup> After much deliberation, Daud sent one of his officers to Munim Khan representing that "Ludi, who had brought him into this whirlpool of notions had received the punishment of his deeds. Now obedience to 'Shahanshah' had taken possession of his whole heart. Whatever extent of territory should be vouchsafed to him would be considered by him as a piece of good fortune."<sup>3</sup>

Emperor Akbar, clearly understanding Daud's duplicity, put forward three proposals to Daud thus "let him (Daud) do one of three things so that the lives and goods of many thousands may not be an offering to ruin. First, let some of his party come to our camps and be a spectator and someone from our side go to his army and be a sentinel, so that no one on either side engage in war, and let us two come into the field of battle and fight with one another with all the arms that he knows, so that whoever by the Divine decree. . . shall be the conqueror, shall have the kingdom. If his courage be not equal to this, let him choose some one of his soldiers who is distinguished for valour and strength of arms and skill in combat. We also send one of our strong armed ones, whose countenance shall be decked with might against him. These two combatants will contend in the arena. The army of whichever of them conquers, shall be victorious. If in his army there be no such lion-heart, then let him choose one of his host of elephants and we too shall produce an elephant magestic as heaven."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115 ; *Makhzam*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Daud's reluctance in accepting these proposals caused great unrest among his Afghan adherents besieged in the fort of Patna. Some of them represented to Daud that "to struggle against crocodiles and fight against dragons being, in fact, nothing but suicide".<sup>1</sup> They opined that it was much safer either to enter upon pacific negotiations and declare themselves dependent of the Mughal emperor or to cross the Ganges with the troops and move off, after which he might at some time measure strength with the Mughals. But Daud still remained unconcerned. Hence his confederates, "being convinced that to fall into the hands of the besiegers, death would be irremedial result", administered narcotic drugs to Daud at night and carried him senseless from the fort and "sent him off for Bengal".<sup>2</sup> How far this statement of Niamatullah is correct, we do not know. But this much can be presumed that being invested on all sides by the Mughals and the fall of Hajipur into Mughal hands caused much terror among the Afghans besieged in the fort of Patna. So great was the terror and confusion that many of the Afghans perished while crossing the Ganges.

Patna, thus, fell into Mughal hands who secured "abundant booty in money, goods and especially noted elephants". Akbar immediately sent a detachment in pursuit of Daud but the detachment returned without having met the object of their pursuit.<sup>3</sup> Thereupon Akbar sent Munim Khan at the head of 20,000 soldiers on 13 August 1574 to march upon Bengal and thereby to conclude the campaign successfully without giving the Afghans time to rally. Nowhere the Afghans could make a stand against the advancing Mughals, and Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Kahlgaon fell into the hands of the Mughals without fight and the Mughals arrived at Gunah, west of Teliagarhi pass where Daud expected to oppose the onward march of the imperialists. Accordingly, Daud strengthened the fort there and himself was there with a large force. The Mughals found it almost impossible to force their march through the pass. The local landlords, who submitted to the Mughals, came to the assistance of the Mughals and represented that there was a secret path through the territory of the Teli Rajah. Led by the local landlords, the Mughals all of a sudden and to the utter surprise of Daud Karrani appeared before the Afghan army.

<sup>1</sup> Dorn, *History of Afghans*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The Afghan plan of resistance thus broke down and they were put to flight in confusion. Daud could not withstand the shock and he too took to flight. Munim Khan entered Tanda, the capital of Bengal on 25 September unopposed.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Mughals occupied the capital of Bengal, it took them many years to subjugate the whole province. The Afghan opposition at this stage assumed a dangerous proportion. Daud Karrani fled to Orissa and the Afghan generals and soldiers raised disturbances wherever they went. Munim Khan in consultation with Raja Todar Mal took up his quarters in Tanda and engaged himself in arranging political and financial matters. Having consolidated his authority in the capital, Munim Khan sent detachments to Satgaon, Ghoraghat (Dinajpur), Bakla (Bakergunj), Sonargaon (Dacca) and Muhammadabad (Jessore-Faridpur) to crush the Afghan opposition and to establish imperial authority.<sup>2</sup> The Afghans could not stand the Mughal attack and in the west, north, central and south Bengal, no Afghan power was left to trouble the Mughals. Of course, no Mughal administration was instituted in any of the occupied regions effectively until then.

Daud still remained unsubdued in Orissa. The Mughals proceeded towards Orissa and Burdwan was made the advanced base.

The Supreme Mughal Commander remained at Tanda.

Mughal advance to Orissa

The imperial army on its way to Orissa, encamped at the port of Satgaon and took measures to soothe the distracted inhabitants there. At this stage news reached the Mughal camp that Srihari who "was Daud's rational soul" parted with his master and took refuge in the wilderness of Katwa. Srihari's desertion injured Daud's cause to a considerable extent. Meanwhile Raja Todar Mal joined the advance party and urged them to speed up their march in order to dislodge Daud from Orissa. The Mughal army under the command of Todar Mal advanced from Burdwan to Garh-Mandarn in the Hughly district. From thence Todar Mal marched to Kolia. While the imperialists had been steadily advancing, the sudden death of Muhammad Quli Barlas caused great disorder in the Mughal camp and the troops refused to continue the jungle campaign. Todar Mal's attempts to pacify the troops having failed, he at once acquainted Munim Khan with the

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama, III*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 189.

state of affairs and requested him to send money to satisfy the troops.<sup>1</sup> Munim Khan set out from Tanda and joined Todar Mal. Daud had been awaiting the arrival of the Mughals in Garh-Haripur, eleven miles south-east of Danton station. He took special care to strengthen the approaches. He had also barricaded the regular road from Midnapore southwards. The difficulties of the march disheartened the imperial troops and they clamoured for some sort of agreement with the Afghans. Munim Khan convened a council of war. Some preferred peace to war, while others preferred war but reflected upon the difficulties of the communications. At last by the exertions of Todar Mal and the firmness of Munim Khan, all agreed to fight. With the help of the local people, an obscure path was discovered. Daud's all plans for fortifying the regular roads were thus frustrated. With a heart dejected, Daud turned back and resolved upon fighting. He sent off his family to Cuttack and lightened his army. He now advanced from his camp and the two armies came face to face on the plain of Tukaroi, nine miles south-east of Danton railway station.

**The battle of Tukaroi (March, 1575) :** The infatuated Daud gathered round him a large number of local people and thought of fighting the Mughals once more. The news of Daud's preparations made the sedition-mongers in the Mughal camp more active. The soldiers clamoured for retreat. Upon the appraisal of the situation, Munim Khan arrived on the spot, cajoled the troops into a fighting mood and pushed forward.<sup>2</sup> The imperialists then besieged the Afghan fort. The Afghans had no sufficient equipment for the defence of the fort, nor means of fighting, while the imperialists were numerous. To avert the critical situation, Daud offered peace only to hoodwink the Mughals later. He sent his officers who by means of "gold and words" induced the leaders of the imperial army to come to terms. Todar Mal rejected the peace offer outright as he had the least faith in Daud's gesture. But his objections were of no avail and Munim Khan expounded the terms of peace thus—first, Daud should come and accept the imperial service and send noted elephants and other presents for the emperor. After he had rendered services satisfactorily, he was to "convey his ashamed face to the holy threshold. . . and have it

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

coloured with fidelity".<sup>1</sup> Further, Daud was to send one of his confidentials to the imperial Court to act as his representative.<sup>2</sup>

Upon Daud's refusal to accept these terms, the war began. The numbers on both sides were nearly equal. But the Afghans had two hundred elephants by whose strength they hoped to break through the imperial squadrons. On the imperial side, Munim Khan had brought with him a number of small guns mounted upon carriages. The battle was contended "with greater obstinacy than had ever occurred between the two nations, for although the guns succeeded in putting the elephants to the rout, and driving them back. . . yet the Afghan cavalry charged with such resolution that the Mughal line was thrown into great confusion."<sup>3</sup> The Afghan van broke the imperial "Ultimash" and swept away the centre itself. Munim Khan and other imperial officers gave a good account of them and received severe wounds. The Mughal Commander-in-Chief was pushed upto five miles behind the fort. Elated at this success, the Afghans instead of pursuing the fugitive Mughal Commander-in-Chief, rather engaged themselves in plundering his deserted camp. This caused the ruin of the Afghans. Daud did not follow up the victory of his general Gujar Khan and refrained from attacking upon the Mughal centre. The Afghan right-wing under Sikandar made no serious attack upon the Mughal left-wing. In the meantime the scattered Mughal troops rallied in perfect order and made vigorous charges upon the Afghans. In one encounter, the Afghan veteran Gujar Khan was killed. The death of Gujar Khan emboldened the Mughals and "in a short space of time the enemy was driven off and the victors proceeded against the (Afghan) centre".<sup>4</sup> Threatened from all sides, Daud lost his heart and could not continue the fight any longer. Daud's inactivity broke the discipline in the Afghan camp and the Afghan soldiers took to desperate flight. Daud fled to the fort of Cuttack, leaving his camp to be plundered by the imperialists. The Mughals though victorious had suffered so much that they did not pursue the fugitives. After five days of the battle, the Mughals proceeded till they reached the vicinity of Cuttack where they encamped.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 184.



Realising his critical situation, Daud sought for peace and intimated his desire to accept the terms proposed earlier by Munim Khan. On April 12, 1575 the victory so easily achieved by the Mughals was celebrated. A pleasant spot was chosen outside the imperial camp and it was adorned to the admiration of beholders. Daud accompanied by his officers and adherents came to the Mughal camp. Munim Khan came out of the camp to welcome Daud and displayed warm affection. Abul Fazl describes the situation as follows : "Daud loosed his sword and left it behind him, implying that he had left off soldering and had made himself over to the sublime court and would do whatever the pillars of the empire thought it right for him to do. The Khan-Khanan (Munim Khan) made him over to his servants and after a time a splendid khilat was given to him . . . and a sword and embroidered belt was bound upon his waist. Daud with the humblest loyalty turned towards the quarter of the capital and made the prostration of service. He presented noted elephants, the varieties of the country and abundant money and made over Shaikh Muhammad, the son of Bayazid. . . that he might accompany Munim Khan to court. . . when Daud received leave to depart, some estates in Orissa were given in fief to him."<sup>1</sup>

### *The Third Phase of the Mughal-Afghan Hostilities (1575-1605)*

The battle of Tukaroi was a turning point in the history of medieval Bengal. The fall of Daud Karrani led to the rise of disruptive forces which took long time to be suppressed by the Mughals. Daud surrendered himself at the feet of Munim Khan at Cuttack and the ceremony which was observed on that occasion proclaimed the *de jure* annexation of Bengal to the Mughal empire. But truly speaking, imposition of a regular Mughal administration and imperial peace on Bengal was still far off. Bengal lost its political cohesion and for many years the province suffered from utter confusion and anarchy. It should not be supposed that immediately after the victory at Tukaroi, Bihar and Bengal as a whole came under effective Mughal domination. In fact, a few towns in Bihar and fewer still in Bengal situated scatteredly came under the possession of Mughal military officers and even in these

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 185. According to Stewart, (*Op. cit.*, p. 186) the whole of Orissa was granted to Daud as his fief.

occupied regions the Mughal authority was not effectively imposed. Disruptive elements were rampant everywhere which made the prospect of a regular government well-nigh impossible and which at times threatened the very existence of the loosely established imperial authority. The fall of the Karrani dynasty created a state of vacuum in the political sphere. The absence of a strong and regular government encouraged the local landlords to make encroachments upon each others' estates, the prospect of wealth corrupted the imperial officials and soldiers, while the discredited and still unsubdued Afghans were looking for new abodes in the provinces of Bihar and Bengal. The local risings of the Afghan and Hindu landlords from time to time made the tasks of conquest and consolidation extremely difficult for the Mughals. In fact, "the history of the years 1575-1604 is a sickening monotonous tale of local offensives with varying results but no final decision, and the temporary expansion and retreat of the imperial power, while the weak and the innocent suffered at the hands of both the parties".<sup>1</sup>

The period between 1575 and 1604 was a period of conquering generals who were primarily interested in expanding the Mughal sway over eastern India. But the chief obstacle in the way was the determined Afghan resistance extending over the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

In this connection, it is to be noted that the Mughal victory over the Afghans might have been easier had not the Mughal officials in the provinces risen to open rebellion. A number of Mughal generals posted at different places in Bengal and Bihar resorted to all sorts of crimes in accumulating wealth and as Abul Fazl says that their only thought was "how to carry away their pile of gains from this pestilential climate". The attempts of the newly arrived civil officers from the court to check the illegal gains of the old officers pushed the latter into despair and as a consequence rebellions broke out in Bihar and Bengal. This unhappy situation encouraged the dispossessed Afghans everywhere to anti-Mughal activities.

The death of Munim Khan followed by the out-break of an epidemic<sup>2</sup> brought further miseries to the Mughals in the eastern

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart describes the situation thus "whether owing to the dampness of the soil, the badness of the water or corrupted state of air, a pestilence very shortly broke out amongst the troops and inhabitants. Thousands died every day and the living tired with burying the dead, threw them into the river without distinction of Hindoo or Mohammanan."—*History of Bengal*, p. 186.

provinces. Terror broke out among the surviving Mughal officers and soldiers. On being left leaderless, all the Mughal officers left Bengal Mughal detachments first left Gaur and then abandoned Bengal altogether retreating to Bhagalpur enroute to Delhi.

The rebellion of the Mughal officers and soldiers was the signal of fresh troubles with the Afghans. Daud Karrani broke his oath, rose in rebellion in Orissa, occupied Badrak and Jaleswar and reoccupied his lost possession in Bengal. Afghan risings Isa Khan of Sonargaon fell upon Shah Bardi who had charge of the Mughal boats and artillery of the province and drove away the Mughal flotilla from East Bengal rivers. Junaid Karrani (first cousin of Daud Karrani) acting independently from his base in Jharkhand, troubled South Bihar and formed a rallying centre of rebels and malcontents. Khan-i-Jahan's Vice - royalty 1575-78 On hearing of Munim Khan's death, Akbar appointed Hasain Quli Beg entitled Khan-i-Jahan with Raja Todar Mal as his lieutenant in November 1575. The Bengal officers by that time reached the neighbourhood of Bhagalpur when the imperial army under Khan-i-Jahan and Todar Mal arrived there. The bewilderment of these self-interested men increased. They were not inclined to turn back and co-operate with Khan-i-Jahan nor they ventured to proceed to Delhi. Most of them discoursed upon the refractoriness of the people of Bengal, the pestilential atmosphere of the province and hence refused to go back. Moreover, Khan-i-Jahan's religious faith caused further trouble in the camp of the rebel officers and soldiers. Khan-i-Jahan was Bairam Khan's sister's son, a Persian and a Shia, while most of the Bengal officers were Turks and Sunnis. However, Khan-i-Jahan and Todar Mal succeeded with great difficulty in prevailing upon the terrorised Mughal officers to turn back. The imperial army under the command of Khan-i-Jahan and Todar Mal recovered very easily the Teliagarhi pass. The Afghan commandant Ayaz Khasa Khail fell into the hands of the imperial troops. Daud in his pride never imagined that the imperial army would come so soon. On being apprised of its approach, Daud fell back on Rajmahal and took defensive measures. Khan-i-Jahan stood for months facing Daud near Rajmahal. But owing to the difficulties of the country and the time, there was no engagement.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 231.

The stalemate was ended when Muzaffar Khan, the Mughal general posted in Bihar, came to the assistance of Khan-i-Jahan under the order of the emperor. Boats laden with money and provisions were at the same time despatched by the imperial court which gave encouragement to the imperial troops, while on the other hand, filled the hearts of the Afghans with terror. A detachment under Shahbaz Khan was sent to suppress Gajapati, a noted landlord of Bihar in order to restore the land-line of communication across the Son as well as to prevent him from assisting Daud. A large number of self-interested persons gathered round Gajapati and his seditiousness became more and more pronounced. He extended his power over quite a large number of towns in Bihar. When Gajapati raided Arrah town, its Jagirdar Farhat Khan shut himself up in the fort. Gajapati entered into negotiations with Daud and exerted himself to close the lines of imperial march. Shahbaz Khan hastened to the spot and the Mughal Officers in Bihar like Said Khan, Makhsas Khan and others joined him. Meanwhile Gajapati's arrogance increased and he brought many towns and villages under his possession.<sup>1</sup>

On July 10, 1576, the Mughal troops of Bihar and Bengal joined. Khan-i-Jahan met the chief officers of the Bihar force and treated them well. An immediate engagement with Daud Karrani was resolved upon. The imperial forces were arranged as follows : Khan-i-Jahan commanded the centre, the Bihar army formed the right wing and the left wing was under Raja Todar Mal and others. Saham Khan, Morad Khan and others were in the vanguard. Daud's forces were arranged as follows : Daud commanded the centre, Kalapahar commanded the right wing and Junaid the left wing. Khan Jahan, an Afghan fief-holder of Orissa and Qutlu Khan were in the vanguard.<sup>2</sup> On July 12, desperate battle was fought in which the Afghans suffered a crushing defeat. Kalapahar was wounded and he took to flight and so did Qutlu Khan. Junaid, "the sword of the Afghans" was killed. Khan Jahan, who was at the head of the Afghan army also lost his life. "The enemy gave proof of courage", but ultimately left the battle-field. The imperial army chased the fugitives on every side. Many of them in utter confusion lost their lives while swimming across the

Battle array of the rival parties

Battle of Rajmahal July, 1576

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 252.

rivers and streams. The battle-field was filled with noise of victory and in the midst of this joyous confusion Daud was brought as a prisoner.<sup>1</sup> Khan-i-Jahan asked Daud what had become of his agreement and oaths. Daud replied spiritedly, "that engagement was with Khan-i-Khanan (Munim Khan). The time has now come to make friends and to enter into a new treaty".<sup>2</sup> Daud's argument failed to produce any effect and he was beheaded as a treaty-broker. Badaoni writes that Khan-i-Jahan was not in favour of killing Daud, but induced by his officers, he had to deliver such fatal order.<sup>3</sup> With the fall and death of Daud, the Afghan resistance in Bengal collapsed and thus "Bengal came once again into imperial possession".<sup>4</sup> Truly speaking, Bengal was conquered for the second time by the imperialists.

With Daud Karrani terminated the independent status of Bengal and the tradition of independence of the Bengal Kings and with him also terminated the sovereignty of the Afghans over Bengal of which they had held the uncontrolled possession for nearly four centuries.

The government of the Afghans in Bengal was not strictly monarchical but nearly resembled the feudal system as prevailed in Europe. Bakhtiyar Khalji established some sort of clanish feudalism in Bengal which for the most part of the Afghan hegemony remained basically the character of the government in Bengal. Bakhtiyar and his successors retained certain selected districts as their personal domain, while the rest were assigned to the lesser chiefs who in their turn subdivided the lands amongst their subordinate commanders and adherents. These lesser chiefs and subordinate commanders maintained a certain number of soldiers which they were to lend to their superior masters on demand. The lesser Afghans chiefs, however, did not cultivate the land themselves "but each officer was the land-lord of small estate, having under him a certain number of Hindoo tenants to whom, from the principle of self-interest, he conducted himself with justice and moderation, and had it not been for the frequent change of masters and constant scenes of rebellion and invasion, in which private property

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255 ; Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, *Akbarnama*, III, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

was little regarded, the cultivators of the soil would have been placed in a state of comparative happiness; and agriculture would have flourished as it subsequently did in another part of India. . . ."<sup>1</sup> The condition of the upper class Hindus was not very enviable. But the Afghan chiefs and officers, averse to business and frequently called away from their homes to attend their chiefs, farmed out their estates to the Hindus. Under the Afghan rule, the Hindu fief-holders used to enjoy a great deal of autonomy in their respective fiefs. On these Hindu fief-holders, the Afghan rulers had to depend much for revenue.

However, with the death of Daud, the trouble was not over. In south-west Bihar Daud's accomplice, Gajapati was mediating upon plundering Gazipore. But upon the arrival of Shahbaz Khan, Gajapati's confidence was shaken. He took to flight. He crossed the Ganges and stood ready for the battle. But upon the approach of the imperialists, Gajapati again took to flight. The imperialists took possession of Gajapati's guns, boats and other goods. They besieged the fort of Mashoda in Bihar. Gajapati took shelter in the forests of Bhojpur. But on being threatened by the imperialists, he hastened to Jagdispur. After two months of strenuous fighting, the fort of Jagdispur was taken and Gajapati's family and household property were seized. The campaign was brought to a successful end when Gajapati's son Sri Ram surrendered the fort of Rohtas to the imperialists.<sup>2</sup>

Having concluded the affairs of Daud and Gajapati successfully, Khan-i-Jahan proceeded to Satgaon where Mahmud Khaskhail (popularly known as Mati), Jamshid and other Afghan leaders were creating disturbances and where also the family of Daud was still residing. Mati, who had with him some of Daud's choice treasures, wished to be enrolled among the imperial servants. Internal dissension broke out among the Afghans in Satgaon reigon which ultimately brought destruction upon them without any fighting on the part of the Mughals. At this stage, Daud's mother Naulakha and other members of Daud's family sought for Khan-i-Jahan's protection. Khan-i-Jahan agreed to the proposal and went off from Satgaon to Goas pargana (Murshidabad district) where Naulakha and her party came to pay

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260-266.

respects to the imperial viceroy.<sup>1</sup> Mati also came to offer submission but he was put to death and Daud's treasures in his possession were seized by the viceroy.

Khan-i-Jahan next turned towards Bhawal (North Dacca district) where two Afghan chiefs—Ibrahim Noral and Karimuddin had started fresh disturbances in collusion with the Mughal admired Shah Bardi. Isa Khan of Bhati also raised the standard of rebellion. But the arrival of the Mughal Viceroy at Bhawal filled the malcontents with terror and without a fighting they all submitted. Ibrahim sent his son with rich presents to the Viceroy and sought for protection, which was granted. A large force was sent against Isa Khan and a hot engagement took place near Egarasindur (Mymensing). Isa was defeated and he took to flight abandoning much of his war-equipments and wealth. Just at this time, the imperial army was attacked by Majlis Dilwar and Majlis Qutb, two Afghan landholders in that part of the country. The Mughal troops experienced a severe reverse and in utter confusion turned to flee abandoning their boats. Khan-i-Jahan retreated and came back to Tanda where he died in December 1578.<sup>2</sup> Khan-i-Jahan tried his best "with much perseverance and fidelity" to regulate the government of Bengal. The time when he assumed charge of the Mughal affairs in Bengal and Bihar, was extremely critical. With much prudence and tact, he succeeded not only in suppressing the local rising of the Afghans but also in restoring order and discipline in the Mughal camp. Before his death, he brought the whole of Bihar and certain portions of Bengal under effective Mughal control.

The death of Khan-i-Jahan administered a set-back to the Mughal affairs in Bengal which now reached a most important stage in their evolution. The Mughal affairs in Bengal required a ruler of exceptional ability and integrity not only to preserve peace but also to evolve a settled government in the eastern provinces. As a matter of fact, "the wisdom of Akbar perceived that the age of conquest was over and the more beneficent and enduring work of administration must begin".<sup>3</sup> By this time, Akbar evolved his subah system of administration and decided to institute

Muzaffar Khan  
Turbati's  
Viceroyalty, 1579-  
80: Mutiny of  
Mughal Captains  
in Bengal and  
Bihar

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 376-381.

<sup>3</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 196.

a same type of administration in the provinces under Mughal occupation. With these objects in view, Akbar appointed Muzaffar Khan Turbati, already known for his heroic deeds in Bihar, as the Viceroy and Supreme Commander of the Mughal forces in Bengal in April 1579. With a view to give effect to his new system of Government, Akbar sent from his capital along with the new Viceroy a staff of departmental heads like Diwan, Bakshi, Mir Adil, Sadar, Kotwal, Mir Bahar and Waqunavis.

Muzaffar Khan's administration was doomed to tragic failure on account of political convulsion which arose from the rebellion<sup>1</sup> of the Mughal officers in Bihar and Bengal. The character of the Viceroy was no less responsible for such failure. The Afghans were subdued temporarily. The death of Khan-i-Jahan and the subsequent rebellions of the Mughal officers in Bihar and Bengal again offered the Afghans an opportunity to raise their heads. Muzaffar Khan's tactfulness, habitual wavering and want of heart not only made the loyal officers disgusted but also provoked the disloyal elements to rebellion and encouraging the Afghans thereby to reassert themselves.

The rebellion of Bihar and Bengal officers formally cut off these provinces from the Mughal empire.<sup>2</sup> The Bihar mutineers advanced to Teliagarhi and having forced the pass effected a junction with the mutineers of Bengal. The rebels then laid siege to Tanda and as the garrison everyday had been deserting to the rebels, the viceroy was compelled to yield unconditionally. He was immediately murdered and all his

Bihar and Bengal  
rebels besieged  
Tanda and murdered  
Muzaffar

<sup>1</sup> *Mutiny of the Mughal Officers*: Muzaffar Khan did not exert himself to manage the affairs of the provinces. He gave up the finance. He regarded the imperial officers who accompanied him to Bengal as partners, "withdrew his head from business and assumed grand airs. He left affairs to them and withheld himself from conciliating the soldiers and the peasantry" (Ak, III p. 427). The imperial officers who were sent to Bihar to "conciliate the soldiers, to develop the country and to sympathise with the oppressed" (*ibid*) and to introduce discipline in the army provoked the older section of the officials and generals. "Those who... laid out money in bribes and failed in providing horses while those who did spend money for military things, were driven to distraction by having to conciliate and satisfy the cravings of the greedy officials. Both groups of men got a pretext for discontent and plunged into thoughts of sedition." (*Ibid*). Muzaffar was haughty and did not conciliate friends and strangers. The other officials were greedy. The Bengal officials vigorously set themselves to demand gold from all the Turkomen in the country and to use severity towards them. The turbulent and mercenary who felt themselves aggrieved, raised the standard of rebellion. The cause of the rebellion and defection was the desire to accumulate wealth. Another cause was the misbehaviour of Razavi Khan in Jaunpur. But the most important cause was the retirement of right thinking men who could by ability have suppressed the disturbance.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 195.



wealth plundered by the mutineers.<sup>1</sup> For the next three years from 1580 to 1583 confusion and anarchy continued in Bihar and Bengal.

While Raja Todar Mal, Tarsun Khan and other loyal imperialists were engaged with the rebels in Bihar, Qutlu Lohani a leading officer of Daud attempted with some success to revive the lost dominion of his master and for some years created a principality of his own in Orissa. Qutlu marched against Muhammad Nijat Khan Faujdar of Hughly who made an unsuccessful flight to Salimabad and flew to the protection of Pedro Tavares, a powerful Portuguese Captain. Qutlu next put to flight a Mughal detachment near Mangalkot (Burdwan). He turned against Kiya Khan, a Mughal general who had hitherto maintained peace in Orissa, slew him and that region too was lost to the empire.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile Bahadur Kuruh arrived with an army of Qutlu in the neighbourhood of Tanda and the local rebel leader Masum Khan Kabuli joined the former. The Afghans, thus strengthened proceeded to Patna. The rebels and the Afghans hoped of surprising the city of Patna which was only garrisoned by a small party of loyalists.

Raja Todar Mal sent a detachment to reinforce Patna and proceeded with the main army towards Bihar. In the neighbourhood of Patna, the rebels made an attack in the hope of taking Todar Mal by surprise. But in the skirmish they suffered terribly and were compelled to retreat. As the fortification of the city of Patna could afford them no security, they abandoned Bihar and proceeded to Bengal. "Thus by the prudence and political measures of the Raja, the province of Bihar was, in the first campaign, restored to the imperial authority."<sup>3</sup>

Raja Todar Mal cantoned his army during the rainy season of 1580 in the vicinity of Hajipur and detailed a gloomy picture of the affairs in Bengal to the emperor. The emperor appointed Khan-i-Azam as viceroy of Bengal. With the arrival of Khan-i-Azam (1582-83) strenuous preparations were made for the recovery of Bengal. The viceroy at the head of a large army advanced via Monghyr towards Bengal and reached Teliagarhi pass on March 20, 1583. The rebels came up on 27 March near Rajmahal to give him battle under their

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Akbarnama, III, p. 490.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

leader Masum Khan Kabuli who had already addressed himself to Qutlu and made a league with him to the effect that upon the advance of the imperial officials, he should join him. "For nearly a month, the armies of fortune (imperialists) confronted the rebels and discharged guns and muskets night and day." On 24 April in the heat of the contest, an Afghan flotilla-leader who brought from Faridpur many well-equipped war-boats, was killed. Masum Khan appointed Kalapahar in charge of the flotilla. But soon Kalapahar "who was singular for his skill in river-fighting" fell in the battle. Dissension broke out in the camp of the rebels and many of them were prevailed upon to desert to the imperialists. The loss of their able general disappointed the Afghans and hence they fled to the other parts of Bengal in search of safety. Khan-i-Azam next set about finding a remedy for the crafty Qutlu Lohani. "He (Qutlu) by wiles and flatteries," writes Abul Fazl "brought forward a proposal of peace and sent eloquent and skilful persons to court and made use of blandishment. The answer (from the Mughals) came that if his works corresponded to his words, they should admit him as a servant and restore Orissa to him."<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the parleys, Khan-i-Azam got the order of his transfer to Bihar and Bengal was left in charge of a subordinate officer Wazir Khan. Qutlu in his shortsightedness, seized this opportunity and at once put forward "unfitting conditions" with regard to the proposed peace. The imperialists, therefore, marched from Sherpur (south of Bogra town) to Burdwan, crossed the river Damodar and stood facing Qutlu's army towards the end of June 1583. Qutlu had recourse to tricks. He made use of humility and supplications. He promised obedience to the emperor and agreed to send his brother's son with presents to the court as a mark of his devotion to the imperial authority. But really his design was to deceive the Mughals in an opportune moment and by a stratagem to seize the persons of the Mughal leaders so that he might gain his object. Accordingly, he represented that he was sending his nephew as promised to the court and asked that Sadiq Khan should come without a large retinue from his camp, while he too would come from his camp, so that they might see one another and that he might make over to the Mughal commander his nephew. Sadiq Khan instead of going personally, sent another Mughal commander Shaikh Farid Khan. When the latter arrived at the appointed place, there was no

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 600.

trace of Qutlu.<sup>1</sup> After repeated messages being sent, Qutlu at last waited on Farid Khan and expressed fresh supplications. But his sole intention was to seize Farid by surprise, take him to a remote place and thereby to gain his object by using him as a hostage. The Shaikh perceiving Qutlu's design, left the camp. Qutlu, being thus disappointed at the failure of his scheme, gave the Mughal general a chase and consequently a fighting followed. Qutlu suffered a reverse and he took to flight. But another Afghan commander Bahadur Kuruh preferred a battle. After a severe fighting, the imperialists defeated Bahadur and the Afghans took to flight. The imperialists, instead of pursuing the Afghans, sent a detachment beyond Satgaon to keep a watch over the Orissa frontier where the Afghans had revived their power under Qutlu Lohani.

About this time Shahbaz Khan was sent to Bengal as the Mughal Viceroy and supreme commander of the army. He marched out with the troops from Patna and proceeding by land arrived at the scene of disturbance. Azim Khan took leave and came to Bihar and reposed in his fief. He made over the charge of the army and administration to Shahbaz Khan.<sup>2</sup> Tanda was then in a state of siege by Masum Khan Kabuli. Shahbaz thought it prudent to relieve Tanda first before undertaking operations against Qutlu Lohani. Masum Khan had come from the Bhati with many strife-mongers. He plundered the country within fifteen miles of Tanda which led to a great commotion in and around Tanda. Shahbaz instructed the officers stationed on the Orissa frontier to the effect that "Qutlu had not the strength to engage in battle with the imperialists and it was better that some should come to this quarter". Accordingly a part of Mughal detachment remained on the Orissa frontier, to keep out Qutlu coming from that quarter, while the rest came back to the assistance of Shahbaz Khan. Being reinforced, Shahbaz crossed the Ganges and advanced against the rebels. Masum Khan prepared for a battle. Shahbaz tried to prevail upon Masum and messages

<sup>1</sup> Stewart tells the story differently from Abul Fazl. Stewart writes that Farid did not treat Bahadur with sufficient respect. According to Badaoni, Qutlu received Farid with respect, (here in differing from Abul Fazl who says that Qutlu was absent) and acted as if he was his servant or at least as the servant of Akbar, but that Bahadur wanted to treat Farid on a footing of equality. Bahadur was a Bengal Zamindar as well as an officer of Qutlu, but Farid chose to regard him rather as Qutlu's servant than as a landholder and behaved haughtily to him. (Vide, Elliot, V, p. 429.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 594.

and counter-messages passed between the two camps. Masum accepted the proposition to render loyal service and a treaty was drawn up and sealed by the heads of the army. It was agreed that on following day Masum would render his apologies for the past. But soon Masum changed his mind and took arms. After a hot engagement with the imperialists, Masum retired from Tanda and took refuge in Bhati. Shahbaz hastened to Sherpur (in Bogra), the home of the Afghan rebels. Much booty fell into his hands and 150 noted men among the Afghans were made prisoners.

Shahbaz followed up his success by entering Isa Khan's country. Isa Khan earned the displeasure of the viceroy by giving Masum shelter in his territory, although he assured the Mughal viceroy of surrendering the fugitive on demand. Shahbaz proceeded towards Bhati<sup>1</sup> ignoring the violence of the rainy season. His object was to force Isa Khan to keep his promise of surrendering Masum Khan whom he was still harbouring as well as to test Isa's apparent loyalty which he was always expressing. Advancing by way of Khizrpur, the imperialists occupied Sonargaon and plundered Katrabhu "a populous city". Isa Khan who had gone to Kuch Bihar, arrived at this juncture with a large and well-equipped army and joined Masum Khan Kabuli. The imperialists then took Egarasindur and established a fortified base at Tok (north of Dacca) opposite to Egarasindur. For about seven months, Shahbaz remained encamped at Tok demanding of Isa Khan either the surrender of Masum Khan or his expulsion. Isa Khan gained time by delusive promises. "When it appeared that his (Isa's) tongue and his heart were not in accord, there arose the turbulence of battle. For seven months there were victories from time to time and the evil-doers were put to shame and suffered failure."<sup>2</sup>

But Sahahbaz's violent temper and inordinate pride alienated the local people and made his subordinates discontented. This weakened the position of the Mughals and made the Afghans more active. They collected a number of diggers and cut the bank of the river Brahmaputra in several places. Consequently, water rushed upon the Mughal camp and submerged the batteries. The Afghans brought large war-boats and made an attack upon the viceroy's camp. A

<sup>1</sup> "Bhati is a low country and has received this name because Bengal is higher. It is nearly 400 kos in length from east to west and about 300 kos from north to south"—*Akbarnama*, III, p. 647.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 658.

stiff fighting ensued in which many Afghans were drowned and a large booty fell into the hands of the imperialists. But their leader Isa Khan made a prisoner of Sayyid Husain, the Mughal thanadar of Dacca and through him proposed terms for peace. Isa proposed that an imperial thanadar was to be appointed in the port of Sonargaon and that Masum was to be sent to the Hijaz. As a mark of respect and as a matter of policy, Isa Khan sent presents and 'peshkash' and thereby won over the imperial officers and secured their withdrawal. Having accepted Isa's proposals, Shahbaz Khan fell back to Bhawal and demanded the fulfilment of Isa's promises. But being instigated by some "wicked men in his army", the viceroy changed his mind and put forward fresh conditions. This made the commanders of the Mughal army who received liberal presents from Isa Khan, disgusted and reproached the viceroy that "to make confusions on every occasion and to introduce new clauses was not the rule with right-minded persons".<sup>1</sup> But Shahbaz's obstinacy provoked war and Isa Khan came forward on 30 September 1584 to offer battle. The Mughal generals, as we have already noticed, were averse to fighting with Isa at this stage and hence their half-heartedness compelled Shahbaz to leave Bhawal and retreat towards Tanda abandoning all his accumulations and many of his men as prisoners in the hands of Isa. The disastrous failure of the first Bhati campaign was mainly due to mutual jealousies of the imperial commanders, their insubordination and the inordinate pride and arrogance of their leader which, understandably prevented concerted action on their part in overcoming the Afghans successfully.<sup>2</sup> After this tragic failure, the Afghans in East Bengal became more aggressive and raided the Mughal territories upto Malda city.

While Shahbaz Khan was engaged with Isa Khan in the east, another Mughal army under Wazir Khan had continued facing Qutlu Lohani near Burdwan. Qutlu at last lost endurance, broke up his camp and went off to Orissa and took refuge in the forest of Dharampur. The Mughals gave him a chase and arrived at Tukaroi. Qutlu offered his submission and made huge presents to the Mughal officers. "The officers," writes Abul Fazl, "from cupidity and the hardships of campaigns, did not attend to the circumstances and made use of a

Failure of the  
Bhati campaign

Peace with  
Qutlu in  
Orissa

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 659.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 675.

former order (of the emperor) which was to the effect that if the dweller in the ravine of ruin (i.e. Qutlu) should bind himself to the saddlestraps of enternal dominion (i.e. Mughal empire) they were not to take his (Qutlu's) past into account and were to make over Orissa to him".<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Qutlu was left to enjoy Orissa in peace and in turn as a mark of gratitude, he sent his nephew with 60 noted elephants and other presents. These reached Akbar on 11 June 1584. Wazir Khan was ordered back to Tanda and Sadiq Khan who joined Wazir Khan was ordered to proceed to Patna.

Shahbaz Khan soon earned the displeasure of the emperor and "he was suspected of having received large sums of money for these concessions"<sup>2</sup> from Qutlu Lohani. He was therefore ordered to deliver over the government of Bengal to Wazir Khan and to repair to Agra, "where upon his arrival, he was put into close imprisonment and was not liberated for three years".<sup>3</sup>

Although the Afghan resistance in most parts of Orissa, Bihar and Western Bengal collapsed, Isa Khan in eastern Bengal still continued to be a great menace to Mughal peace. "When motives of self-interest and factiousness had disorganised the leaders of the army (Mughal)," Sadiq Khan as temporary Viceroy Isa Khan became once more somewhat confident and reassured. Being conscious of his weak position, Isa Khan thought of coming into a some sort of understanding with the Mughals. With this object in view, he sent envoys to Sadiq Khan (who was appointed viceroy in March 1585) with the proposals that "he would send Masum Kubuli to the Hijaz and that he himself would behave like a good servant. Also that he would send one of his relations to court to serve there and that he would send there valuable presents. He would also send back what he had taken from the army (Mughal) at the time of the confusion,"<sup>4</sup> (Shahbaz's failure already described). Sadiq Khan agreed upon Isa's proposals and accordingly the latter sent to Akbar the elephants, guns, etc. which had fallen into his hands. Although Isa did not dismiss Masum Kabuli, he restrained him to some extent from creating troubles. But Akbar did not approve these proceedings and he sent Shahbaz Khan again to Bengal in

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 653.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 696.

January 1586 with positive instructions of suppressing Isa Khan. Isa had not the courage to fight and hence made peace by restoring the territory which Sadiq had surrendered to him according to the previous agreement. He also sent more presents. Masum sent his son to the imperial court and himself proceeded on pilgrimage to Hijaz. In the words of Abul Fazl, "the conquests now extended upto the port of Chittagong and things were satisfactorily arranged".<sup>1</sup>

**Raja Man Singh's political exploits (1590-1605) :** Raja Man Singh was first appointed in Bihar where two refractory landlords, Raja Puran Mal of Gidhaur and Anant Chero of Gaya district had declared independence during the eclipse of government in the province. Man Singh, being resolved to subdue the spirit of insurrection which had so long disturbed the peace of the eastern provinces, immediately marched into the territories of Puran Mal and compelled him to take refuge in his fort. Puran Mal, being afraid of the number of imperial troops, sent a most humble message, offering to disband his army, to pay a large sum of money and to give up all his elephants, provide the viceroy would allow him to retain his domain.<sup>2</sup> These terms were accepted by Man Singh. The viceroy succeeded in a short time in extorting tribute and reducing the Bihar landlords to vassalage. Thus "ably settling the province of Bihar and reducing the refractory to obedience", Man Singh next turned towards the half-subdued Afghans of Orissa.

Having assembled the troops of Bihar at Bhagalpur, Man Singh marched through the western hills to Burdwan and reached Arambagh (Midnapore district) the then frontier of Orissa and encamped there till reinforcements reached him from Bengal under the command of Sayid Khan who was acting as his deputy at Tanda. Whilst the imperial army was in this situation awaiting the junction of the Bengal army, Qutlu Lohani sent a division of his army to Raipur, some 50 miles west of the imperial camp with an instruction to plunder the country in that vicinity. To put a stop to the ravages of the Afghans, Man Singh detached his son Jagat Singh. The latter compelled them to retire and to take refuge under the guns of a fort. The Afghans pretended to enter into terms while they had been awaiting

Man Singh's  
Orissa cam-  
paign

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 722.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 207.

reinforcement from their Chief Qutlu Lohani. Jagat Singh was deceived at last and upon the arrival of the reinforcements, the Afghan fell upon the Mughal camp killing a good many of the Mughal soldiers. Jagat Singh, however, escaped and took shelter with the loyal Raja Bir Hamir of Bishnupur. Stewart writes that Jagat Singh was taken prisoner by the Afghans, but it does not seem to be correct.<sup>1</sup> But a rumour prevailed that Jagat Singh was put to death. Raja Man Singh at once held a council to consider how to remedy the matters. Most of the generals present opined to return to Salimabad and then to prepare for battle. Man Singh replied that retreat at that stage would embolden the Afghans and hence he resolved upon fighting.

Fortunately for the royal cause, Qutlu Lohani died a few days after this event and his young son Nasir was placed on the throne by Qutlu's Wazir Khwaja Isa and the Afghans sued for peace. As the rainy season was not yet terminated and Raja Man Singh found himself unable to undertake any active measure, he readily responded to their proposal. Accordingly, Nasir attended by Khwaja Isa visited Man Singh and presented him with one hundred and fifty elephants and many other costly articles. "They then agreed, if allowed to retain quite possession of Orissa, to stamp the coin in the name of the emperor and to prefix his name to all public edicts, further in compliment to the Rajah, they agreed to give up to him the temple of Jagannath and its domain, held sacred by all Hindus. The latter article highly flattered the Rajah and his Brahmin counsellors."<sup>2</sup> Man Singh gladly accepted these terms. Young Nasir was treated with every mark of respect and was permitted to return to Orissa. Having settled the affairs of the Afghans, Man Singh returned to Bihar.

Although the emperor was not at all pleased with the arrangements made by Man Singh, he did not dissolve the agreement. As long as Khwaja Isa lived, the peace between the Mughals and the Afghans was preserved. But within a year Khwaja Isa died and immediately the Afghans broke the treaty, seized upon the temple of Jagannath and plundered the territories of Bir Hamir who once sheltered Jagat Singh. At this turn of events Man Singh resolved upon conquering Orissa and obtained permission from the emperor to this effect. He left

Peace with the Afghans

Man Singh's second Orissa campaign, 1591

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.



Bihar on 3 November 1591, ordered all the troops of Bihar to proceed by the western road to Midnapore, whilst he himself embarked with a chosen detachment in boats and proceeded down the Ganges. At the same time he ordered Sayid Khan, his deputy in Bengal, to unite his troops on this expedition. The Mughals conquered the country upto one day's march of Jaleswar. The Afghans, alarmed at these preparations, assembled all their forces and having retreated across the Suvarna river, waited there the approach of the imperialists. The contending armies continued for some time encamped opposite each other and daily skirmishes took place between their light troops. At length, the Afghans recrossed the river and placing too much dependence upon their elephants, rushed with violence upon the imperial army. But the fire from the imperial artillery soon threw the elephants into confusion and drove them back with terror on the Afghan line, "the squadrons of which having opened and allowed the elephants to pass, made a desperate charge upon the Mughals, but the latter, being superior in numbers, resisted them with vigour. The contest lasted nearly the whole day, at length the Afghans gave way and sought their safety in flight".<sup>1</sup> The imperialists pursued the enemy and took possession of the city of Jaleswar. Here Man Singh had the Khutba read and coins struck in the name of the emperor. The Afghans retreated further south and took shelter in the fort of Sarang-garh (Cuttack District) then in the possession of Ramchandra, the landlord of the country. While Man Singh was thus engaged with the Afghans, Sayid Khan, deputy governor of Bengal, tired of the campaign and envious of the reputation of his superior officer, left the army without permission and went back to Tanda. Notwithstanding this defection, Man Singh invested the fort of Sarang-garh on all sides. At length, upon Ramchandra's solicitations for peace, Man Singh agreed to it provided "that the Afghans should give up all their elephants and promise to conduct themselves in future as faithful subjects of the emperor and the zamindar (Ramchandra) should pay the revenue of the district into the royal treasury, in return for which jaghirs were assigned to the Afghan chiefs in the district of Khalifabad (Faridpur) and the zamindar was allowed to retain possession of Cuttack and its dependencies".<sup>2</sup>

Defeat of the Afghans

Peace with the Afghans

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Thus the province of Orissa was again annexed to the imperial dominions. But it did not bring peace to the Mughals in the eastern provinces. Raja Ramchandra having failed in his engagements, the Mughal army again entered his country and occupied some fortresses belonging to the Raja. At this stage, Man Singh thought it dangerous to implant the surviving Afghan chiefs like Sulaiman and Usman (the nephews of Qutlu Khan) so near to Orissa where they had long traditions of authority and large number of followers. So he cancelled their new assignments and asked them to wait on him. At this the Afghan chiefs raised standard of disturbance, plundered Orissa and Satgaon and joined Isa Khan in eastern Bengal. "Thus the Afghan royal power subverted in West Bengal and Orissa was established anew in East Bengal beyond the Brahmaputra river."<sup>1</sup>

With a view to take charge of both the Governments of Bihar and Bengal, Man Singh laid the foundation of a new capital of Bengal at Rajmahal on 7 November 1595, as a place "which could to some extent be safe from attack by boats... the foundation was laid in a fortunate hour, and in a short time there was a choice city to which the glorious name was given".<sup>2</sup> Here he built a palace and constructed a rampart of brick, strengthened with battions, all round the town.

From this new capital, Man Singh started on 7 December, 1595 on an expedition to conquer Bhati from Isa Khan. Much of Isa's territory fell into Mughal possession. The enemy, failing to resist, crossed the Brahmaputra. Man Singh encamped at Sherpur (Mymensingh) and built a fort there which he named Salimnagar.

In the rainy season of 1596, Man Singh took up his quarters in Ghoraghat where he fell seriously ill. This encouraged Isa Khan, Masum Khan and other half-subdued Afghans. They again took up arms and proceeded against the imperial camp. A Mughal detachment under the command of Man Singh's son Himmat Singh advanced against the Afghans. The latter took to flight and much booty fell into Mughal hands.<sup>3</sup>

But the troubles did not subside. Isa Khan in alliance with

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Akbarnama, III*, p. 1042.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1063.

Raja Raghudev of Kamrup attacked Raja Lakshminarayan of Kuch Bihar. In response to Lakshminarayan's request for help, Man Singh detached his son Durjan Singh to march upon Katrabhu, the very seat of Isa Khan. Isa and Masum arrived with a large number of war boats. They surrounded the Mughal detachment and in a hot engagement, they overwhelmed the imperialists, slew Durjan Singh and took some prisoners. Isa though victorious, thought it prudent not to attack the Mughal and to come to terms. Accordingly, he sent back the prisoners, promised never to attack the Mughal vassal Lakshminarayan and once more professed his loyalty to the Mughal emperor. Two years after Isa Khan having died, one standing menace to Mughal authority in Bengal was removed.

In 1598, under the order of the emperor, Man Singh left Bengal for the imperial court. Man Singh's two sons having died meanwhile, Maha Singh (grandson of Man Singh) was sent to Bengal to act as deputy governor. The departure of Man Singh served as a signal of fresh troubles with the Afghans who under the leadership of Usman rose in revolt. In April, 1600, they advanced against the imperial army under Maha Singh. A general engagement took place in which the imperial army suffered a set-back "in consequence whereof great part of Bengal again became subject to the Afghans".<sup>1</sup> This encouraged the Afghans to further aggressions and they inflicted defeats on several imperial detachments. The news of these reverses having reached the emperor, the latter at once sent back Man Singh to Bengal.

Man Singh arrived at Rhotas and halted there to rest his army and to give the dispersed Mughals an opportunity of joining him. He then pushed on to face the rebel Afghans in East Bengal. Near Sherpur Atia, he inflicted a severe defeat on the Afghans on 12 February, 1601. The Afghans fled away and were pursued a few miles by Mughals.

But Usman, the nephew and successor of Qutlu Khan, continued creating troubles for the Mughals and drove out the Mughal thanadar of Mymensingh. Man Singh proceeded to Bhawal from Dacca and attacked Usman

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 214.

on the bank of the Banar river. Usman suffered a great reverse and much booty fell into the hands of the imperialists.

At the beginning of 1605 Man Singh was recalled to Agra where he continued to stay till the death of Akbar.

With the retirement of Raja Man Singh from Bengal, the Mughal-Afghan hostilities for political supremacy practically came to an end.

Although with the death of Daud Karrani, Afghan central authority broke down, still the veterans of Daud's army and some of his relations continued the struggle against the expanding Mughal power in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The political vacuum created by the fall of the Afghan central power in the eastern provinces, constituted a mighty challenge to the Mughals and it took the latter about 25 years to disarm Afghan hostility. The reasons of the failure of Afghan resistance are not far to seek. The lack of some sort of a central organisation made the position of the Afghans weak since the death of Daud Karrani. After the collapse of the Karrani dynasty, the Afghan generals and soldiers lay scattered in the eastern provinces and being left leaderless continued to pursue their personal designs quite unmindful of any united action. There was complete lack of unity in the camp of the Afghans. While on the other hand, there was unity of command in the imperial camp as every general and soldiers had to carry on his duty under the supreme command of the emperor. The desertions in the Mughal camp sometimes constituted a great threat to the imperial government. But ultimately the imperial court succeeded in suppressing the Mughal rebels and thereby reasserting the central command. The resources of the Afghans were extremely limited and weak and it was never possible for them to continue their struggle for an indefinite period against the powerful and resourceful Mughal empire. The entire Mughal empire was at the back of the Mughal campaigns in the eastern provinces. Raja Man Singh's appointment in Bengal considerably weakened the Afghan resistance as the Raja succeeded in winning over quite a large number of Hindu landlords to the imperial side and thereby depriving the Afghan chiefs of the active co-operation of the Hindu landlords and their subjects. In this context the friendly relations between the Kuch King Lakshminarayan and the Mughal emperor may be cited which produced tremendous influence on the Hindu landlords of Bengal.

Causes of failure  
of Afghan  
resistance

*A Short Note on Isa Khan*

Abul Fazl in the *Ain* calls Isa 'Isa Afghan'. In the *Akbarnama* (Vol. III, 647), Abul Fazl says that—Isa's father was a Bais Rajput, that is a Rajput belonging to Baiswara in Oudh. Abul Fazl's account corroborates the family tradition mentioned by Wise that "Isa's father was a Bais Rajput whose name was Kali Das Gajdani and that when he became a Muhammadan, he received the title of Sulaiman Khan".<sup>1</sup> According to Abul Fazl, Isa's father settled in the riverain tract of Bengal and once revolted against the Sultan of Delhi, Salim Shah. Taj Karrani and Dariya Khan were sent against the rebel who gave in ultimately and subsequently he was pardoned. But soon afterwards, he again rebelled. The Sur generals Taj Karrani and Dariya Khan, by a stratagem, got hold of him and put him to death. His two sons Isa and Ismail were sold to a merchant who carried them to Central Asia.<sup>2</sup> When Taj Karrani became predominant in Bengal (1564), Isa Khan's paternal uncle Qutbuddin "obtained glory for good service" and after much searching, found his two nephews and brought them back to Bengal from Turan. It is to be noted here that Qutbuddin deserted Sher Shah and became a recluse in disgust of the Sultan's breach of faith towards Puran Mal, a landlord of Bihar. Isa Khan possessed certain remarkable traits of character and soon acquired fame for his military prowess and ripe judgment and "rose to be at the head of the Twelve Zamindars of Bengal".<sup>3</sup> According to Abul Fazl, there were twelve Zamindars in eastern Bengal exclusive of Isa Khan. According to the tradition preserved by the Jangalbari raj-family, Isa married Fatima, a daughter of one Sayid Ibrahim. According to Wise, he married a daughter of Chand Rai of Vikrampur. Abul Fazl calls Isa Khan the ruler of Bhati and he always professed loyalty to Sulaiman Karrani and Daud Karrani. Gait says that "an Afghan, named Isa Khan, the bhuiya of Khizrpur, near Narayan-gunj in Dacca, was already a powerful chief in the time of Daud".<sup>4</sup> Isa Khan, though professed loyalty to the Karrani ruler of Bengal, never paid a personal visit to the court of Bengal. After the overthrow

<sup>1</sup> Bradley writes : "This chief (Isa Khan) was the grand-son of Kalidas Gazdani, a Hindu, who it is said, delighted in religious controversies and having been worsted in argument by a learned Mussalman, acknowledged his defeat and embraced the faith of Islam"—Dacca, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Beveridge, *J.A.S.B.*, 1904, Vol. 73, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 62.

of Daud Karrani by the Mughals in 1575, Isa Khan became the acknowledged leader of the Afghans throughout the eastern part of Bengal and at one time he ruled the entire region from Ghoraghat (on the right bank of the Karotoya) to the sea. He was defeated by the Mughal general Shahbaz Khan in 1583 and fled by ship to Chittagong. There he collected a large force and with this force he proceeded to carve out a kingdom for himself. Encouraged at the dismemberment of the Kuch kingdom during the reign of the Kuch king Naranarayan, Isa Khan selected for the first operation the southern outlying portion of the tract assigned by Naranarayan to his rival nephew Raghudev. The latter tried to resist the invaders and seized a fort where the village of Jangalbari in Mymensingh now stands. But the defenders ultimately failed to hold it against the vigorous onslaught of Isa Khan and his followers. Raghudev himself escaped. Following up his victory, "Isa Khan took from the Koches the whole country as far as Rangamati in the Goalpara district".<sup>1</sup> It cannot be doubted that Isa Khan created a sphere of his influence in eastern Bengal and thereby posed a great challenge to the Mughals. Throughout his life, he remained a sore enemy of the Mughals and only professed lip-deep obedience to the Mughal emperor towards the close of his life. Ralph Fitch who was at Sonargaon for some time, has observed: "The chief king of all these countries was called Isa Khan and he is the chief of all other kings and is a great friend of the Christians."

About the story of abduction of Chand Rai's daughter (Sonai or Swarnamayee) by Isa Khan, Wise writes: "Between Isa Khan of Khizrpur, whose stronghold was on the opposite bank of the Ganges and the two brothers (Chand Rai and Kedar Rai of Sripur), there was constant warfare. Isa Khan made a successful raid into his enemies country, carried off and forcibly married Sonai, the only daughter of Chand Rai."<sup>2</sup> According to Bradley, "Sonai Bibi won by the courage and address of her captor, soon ceased to repine at her lot and renouncing Hinduism, she embraced her husband's faith remaining throughout his life a devoted help-mate and defending his kingdom against his enemies, with kith and kin even after his decease".<sup>3</sup>

Isa Khan died in 1599 leaving two sons, Musa Khan and Diwan

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> Bradley, *Romance of an Eastern Capital*, p. 64.



**Muhammad Khan.** Abul Fazl has referred to another son of Isa Khan whose name was Daud and who gave much trouble to Raja Man Singh.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE MUGHALS AND THE TWELVE BHUIYAS OF BENGAL

Emperor Jahangir's reign forms a landmark in the history of Bengal. The defeat of Daud Karrani in the battle of Tukaroi proclaimed the *de jure* annexation of Bengal to the Mughal empire, but the actual imposition of Mughal rule on Bengal was still far off. Since that time till the fall of Khwaja Usman in 1611, the province remained a scene of confusion and political turmoil. A few towns and outposts only came under Mughal occupation and even in them the Mughal authority was to face serious challenge from the local Hindu and Afghan landlords from time to time. The whole of Akbar's reign and the first eight years of Jahangir's reign, were the age of conquering generals and during this period Bengal was only under an armed occupation of the Mughals when introduction of a regular administration became almost impossible. Jahangir's reign marked a definite change in Mughal policy and attitude towards Bengal. So long the Mughal governors in Bengal were primarily soldiers interested only in suppressing the pretensions of the Afghan and Hindu landlords and securing their nominal submission to the Mughal emperor. In fact, they never seriously attempted to annex the territories of the Afghan and Hindu landlords and thereby to impose Mughal administration on the province. It has already been stated that whenever the local chiefs and landlords made nominal submission to the Mughal emperor, the military governors of Bengal allowed them to enjoy their local autonomy. As a result imposition of Mughal peace and regular government did not become possible. It was only in the reign of Jahangir that serious efforts were made to annex Bengal completely to Pax-Mughalia and to introduce subah system of administration in the province.

To achieve this object, the Mughal governors of Bengal henceforth devoted their whole attention to the elimination of the local chieftains and landlords popularly known as 'Bhuiyas' who formed the second line of defence against the imperial power. "The zamindars big and small seem to have been played off one against the others, with promises of imperial favour and reward, sometimes in the shape of



territories, obviously with a view to preventing a unified and concerted resistance, until all of them one after another, were deprived of their independence and reduced to vassalage."<sup>1</sup>

Bengal proper at the beginning of Jahangir's reign was much larger in size than what it was in the time of the British rule. But it should not be supposed that the conquering generals of Akbar's time conquered the whole of the land. As has been told earlier that only a few towns in Bihar and fewer still in Bengal were actually brought under effective rule of the Mughals, while the rest of the province remained in the possession of independent landlords and Mughal vassals. At the beginning of Jahangir's reign the important outposts under actual Mughal control in Bengal were Rajmahal, Ghoraghat, Sherpur (Mymensingh), Dacca, Bhawal and Tok. Mughal authority did not extend beyond these military outposts.

The Baharistan gives us a fair idea of the prominent 'Bhuiyas' who continued to enjoy practically independent sway. They were

Prominent  
Bhuiyas of  
Bengal

Bir Hamir of Birbhum and Bankura, Shms Khan of Pachet, Salim Khan of Hijli, Pitambar of Puthea, Ananta of Chilajuwar, Ilah Bakhsh of Alipur, Mirza Mumin of Catmohar, Madhu Ray of Kalsi, Majlis Qutab of Faridpur, Raja Satrajit of Bhusna, Raja Raghunath of Shushang, Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore-Khulna, Raja Ramchandra of Bakerganj, Ananta Manikya of Bhulna, Musa Khan of Sonargaon, Bahadur Ghazi of Chaura, Suna Ghazi of Sarail, Bayazid of Sylhet, and Khwaja Usman of Bokainagar.

Besides these prominent Bhuiyas in Bengal proper, there flourished a number of prominent ruling dynasties beyond the frontier tracts of

Independent  
frontier  
states

Bengal like Kuch Bihar, Kamrup contiguous to Kuch Bihar, Assam contiguous to Kamrup, Kachar and Tippera. It was only when Bengal proper came under effective control of the Mughals, that the Mughal power came into direct contact with these frontier states excepting Kuch Bihar which was reduced to Mughal vassalage in the time of emperor Akbar.

**Origin of the Bhuiyas :** There is a lot of controversy regarding the origin of the Bhuiyas and the authorities are not unanimous on this point. According to Sir Jadunath Sarkar "they (Bara Bhuiyas) were nearly all of them upstarts who had in their own persons or one

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 234.

generation earlier grabbed at some portion of the dissolving Karrani Kingdom of Bengal and set up as masterless Rajas in their different corners of the country, especially in the inaccessible regions of the sea-coast in Khulna and Baqarganj or beyond the mighty barrier of the Brahmaputra in Dacca and still remoter jungles of North Mymensigh and Sylhet... The eclipse of royal authority at the centre of the government of Bengal was the opportunity of these usurpers of neighbours' territories; they had the brief day in the twilight between the setting Afghan kingship and the rising Mughal empire in Bengal...<sup>1</sup> According to Ralph Fitch who visited Bengal in 1586 writes, "they be all hereabouts rebels against their king Jalaluddin Akbar, for here are so many rivers and islands that they flee from one to another, whereby his (Akbar's) horsemen cannot prevail against them."<sup>2</sup> Jarric, who derived his information from Jesuit missionaries, who visited Bengal at the end of the 16th century, states that the chiefs of twelve kingdoms in Bengal obeyed no one, paid no tribute and though they displayed royal splendour "did not call themselves kings but Boiones."<sup>3</sup> The latter is obviously a translation into Latin of the word Bhuiyas. According to Jarric these chiefs were collectively known as the Bara (Twelve) Bhuiyas. Jarric further writes that three of these chiefs were Hindus and the remaining nine were Muhammadans. Again Manrique, a Spanish monk of the order of the Saint Augustin who resided in India from 1628 to 1641, states in his Itinerary that the kingdom of Bengal was divided into twelve provinces under twelve vassal chiefs whom the natives called the "Boiones de Bengala".<sup>4</sup>

"These authorities", says Dr. Wise "advance our knowledge considerably. The Bhuiyas, according to them, had been dependents of the king of Gaur, but had acquired independence by force of arms. They refused to pay tribute or to acknowledge allegiance to any one. From being prefects appointed by the king (of Gaur) they had become kings with armies and fleets at their command, ever ready to wage war against each other or to oppose the invasions of Portuguese pirates or Magh freebooters."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, pp. 225, 226.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *District Gazetteer—Faridpur*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer—Jessore*, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> *J.A.S.B.*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, 1874.

The word 'Bhuiya' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bhowmik' which means holder of the land. According to Hindu mythology the universe at the beginning of its creation was ruled by "Eleven Gods". In continuation of the tradition, the Emperor or 'Samrat' ruled his empire with the help of twelve vassal rulers. The vassal rulers enjoyed complete independence within their domain in return for a fixed tribute only. Being the holders of land, these vassal rulers were called 'Bhowmik'. The word 'Baro-Bhuiya' had a long tradition in the history of Bengal and in fact, Bengal was popularly called a Land of Baro-Bhuyias. But it is still a riddle as and when, how and by whom these Bhuyias were appointed. There are ample references to Bhuiya in the old literature of Bengal, the *Chandi of Kavikankan* and *Dharmamangala* of Manik Ganguli. According to some the Bhuyias took their origin during the Turko-Afghan rule in Bengal. But this view seems to be untenable. As Wise states that "the titles bestowed by the Delhi Kings were mostly Arabic or Persian, rarely Sanskrit. It is probable therefore that Bhowmik was conferred by the Hindu princes of Gaur or Nadia."<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, long before the Muslim conquest, the Hindu emperors used to appoint vassal rulers of different grades for the consolidation and security of the empire. These vassal rulers were generally called 'Baro-Bhuiya' (first-grade), 'Madhya Bhuiya' (second-grade) and 'Chhota-Bhuiya' (last grade).<sup>2</sup> Wise has referred to such grades, as he writes, "the Raja of Kachar conferred the titles of Bara-Bhuiya, Madhya-Bhuiya and Chhotta-Bhuiya on any petty land-holder (Mirasdar) who paid him a fee of 50 rupees."<sup>3</sup> Possibly, the word Bara-Bhuiya was transformed into Baro (Twelve) Bhuiya in the succeeding ages. According to Jogesh Chandra Gupta, the Bhuyias took their origin in the middle of the 16th century and their romantic career came to an end in the reign of emperor Jahangir.<sup>4</sup>

As to the question how the number of the chiefs came to be fixed at 'Twelve', there are different views. S. C. Mitra in his *History of Jessore-Khulna* (II, pp. 20-26) writes : "It is traditionally known that immediately before or after the conquest of Bengal by the Mughals, twelve such chiefs rose into prominence. They parcelled out the whole of Bengal, particularly Lower Bengal among themselves and Bengal of those days came to be known as the country of the Baro-

<sup>1</sup> J.A.S.B., 1874.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, H. Chatterjee, *Vikramurer Itihas*, Vol. I.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Gupta, *Vikramurer Itihas*, p. 87.

**Bhuiyas or Twelve Chiefs.** But it can hardly be said that their number was exactly twelve and all those twelve flourished at the same time. . . . Twelve is a sacred number to the Hindus and the assemblage of twelve chiefs is a peculiar feature of India. Twelve subordinate chiefs are spoken of from very ancient times. In Manu-Samhita, the emperor has around him twelve chiefs holding different relations with him. The powerful kings spoken of in old Bengali literature sat in their courts surrounded by twelve chieftains. In Assam also, like Bengal twelve chiefs or ministers were essential for the constitution of a State. In Arrakan<sup>1</sup> and Siam also, the coronation of a King was accompanied by the installation of twelve chiefs under him. . . . In fact, it does not appear that their number was exactly twelve. Many writers have attempted to enumerate the Twelve Bhuiyas specifically, but no two lists agree.”<sup>2</sup>

The passage quoted above does not however clear the issue. It is not clear whether the number of Bengali Bhuiyas was fixed at twelve

because twelve is a sacred number to the Hindus or the number twelve signifies an indefinite number. The contemporary writers have referred to them as twelve. Abul Fazl has also described them as

twelve. Mirza Nathan, the author of the Baharistan repeatedly mentions Musa Khan and the Twelve Bhuiyas but he does not definitely tell us who these Twelve Bhuiyas were. The enigma of the question relating to the number has been elaborately discussed by N. K. Bhattasali and we would do well by quoting him. “But whence”, he asks, “was this partiality for this number twelve derived even to signify an indefinite number ? Are we justified in holding that it was the prescription of Manu-Samhita that an overlord should have twelve subordinate chiefs under him that was obeyed in Bengal and continued down to the 16th century ? Let us consider what was the condition of things before the rise of the so-called Twelve Bhuiyas.

“Little is known of the pre-Gupta rule in Bengal. During the rule of the Gupta emperors, Eastern India was divided into two or three big divisions called Bhuktis and an Uparika or Governor was placed over each of them. The Bhuktis were divided into a number of Vishayas or districts and a Vishyapati or a district

<sup>1</sup> Manrique who witnessed such coronation of a Arrakan King in 1631 writes, “that the new dignitary had himself proclaimed not only lord of twelve Bhuiyas of Bengal but the twelve kings on the crown of whose heads, the soles of his feet always rested”—Vide, *J.A.S.B.*, Vol. IX.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, XXV, 1928, p. 30.

officer was placed in charge of each district. A division called Mandala is also met with, but the mutual relationship of a Mandala and a Vishaya has not yet been ascertained. During the rule of the post-Gupta princes of Karna-Suvarna of the Palas, Varmanas and Senas, Uparikas and Vishyapatis are still enumerated in the list of the government officers. With the shrinking of the size of the kingdoms, uparikas probably became names, but the district officers kept their positions up to the end of the Hindu rule in Bengal. I do not find any place for Twelve Chieftains in the fabric of government nor is there any evidence to prove that the vishyapatis or district officers were only twelve in number.”<sup>1</sup>

After the occupation of Bengal by the Turko-Afghans and under the rule of powerful princes like Ilyas Shah, Sikandar Shah and Husain Shah, the whole province was held in military occupation and the only change that appears to have been effected was the supplanting of the vishyapatis of the Hindu days by a number of jagirdars each of whom was put in charge of the part of the province which was assigned to him. But we have no positive evidence to prove that these jagirdars were only twelve in number. How then to account for *Manu-Samhita's* number twelve just at the beginning of the Mughal rule? Would it be correct to suppose that there was a Hindu revival at the beginning of the Mughal rule? This would have been a plausible supposition if all the Bhuiyas or Chiefs were Hindus. But it is evident from the contemporary writings that at least nine of the chiefs were Muhammadans. How then to account for this number twelve?

Let us turn to the history of Assam for the solution of this riddle. Gait says that intermediate region between the kingdom of Kamta on the west and the Chhutiya and the Kachari kingdoms on the east, was occupied by a number of petty chiefs called Bhuiyas. Each was independent of the others but they seem to have been in the habit of joining their forces whenever they were threatened by a common enemy. These chiefs are all remembered in Assam legends as ‘Baro-Bhuiyas’, “a title which was formerly supposed to indicate a connection with the aboriginal titles of the same designation in Chhotanagpur. This of course is not the case and Dr. Wise has clearly shown in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

connection with Eastern Bengal where there was also in former times a group of chiefs bearing the same title, that in this connection, the word Bhuiya has nothing to do with caste but is merely the sanskrit equivalent of the Persian word 'Zamindar'. It is not clear why the number 'twelve' should always be associated with them both in Bengal and Assam. Whenever they are enumerated twelve persons are always mentioned, but the actual names vary just as in the case of Muhammadan 'Panch-Pir'. It seems to have been the practice in this part of India for the kings to appoint twelve advisers or governors. Naranarayan had twelve ministers of state, twelve chiefs or 'dolois' administered the hilly portion of the Raja of Jaintia's dominions and there were twelve state councillors in Nepal."<sup>1</sup>

Two traditions are recorded regarding the origin of these Bhuiyas in the valley of Assam. The Bhuiyas who were ruling north of Brahmaputra and east of the Chhutiya kingdom at the time of the advent of the Ahoms in the Upper Brahmaputra valley, claimed to be the descendants of Samudra. Samudra was succeeded by his son Manohar whose daughter Lakshmi obtained two sons, Santanu and Samanta through divine intercession. Each of these two sons is said to have become the father of twelve children. Santanu's twelve sons occupied the district of modern Nowgong, south of the Brahmaputra. Samanta's twelve sons, on the other hand, came to occupy Lakshimpur district, north of the Brahmaputra and both of these sets came to be known as Twelve Bhuiyas. These Bhuiyas later submitted to the Ahom King Sukha-Fa and are called the 'adi' or the original Bhuiyas.<sup>2</sup>

Another tradition refers to another different set of Bhuiyas. In the *Gaura-charita* as well as in the *Sankara-charita*, there is another version of the origin of the Baro-Bhuiyas of Nowgong. A Raja of Kamtapur named Durlbhanarayan went to war with another Raja named Dharmanarayan who styled himself Gaureswara or Lord of Gaur. "This title was often claimed by quite a number of petty chiefs. Gaur was also the ancient name of a part of the modern district of Sylhet. It is impossible to say where Dharmanarayan ruled, but the story goes that when peace was concluded he sent seven families of Brahmans and seven families of Kayasthas to Durlabh who settled them on the frontier as wardens of the marches and gave

<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Bengal—*Past and Present*, XXV, 1928.

them land and slaves. When the Koch kings rose to power, they subdued a number of local chiefs who ruled the country between the Sankosh and the Barnadi, but these, though also called Bhuiyas, were not in any way connected with those whose traditional origin has been narrated above."<sup>1</sup>

There is much similarity in the rise of the Baro-Bhuiyas in Bengal and of those in Assam. In each of these places, a number of petty chiefs arose and became independent when there was a complete suspension of a centralised government. Thus the independent chiefs that arose in Bengal after the fall of Daud Karrani received the popular name of Baro-Bhuiyas. The Twelve Bhuiyas of Bengal and Assam owed their origin to political anarchy whereas those of Arrakan to peaceful statecraft. The role of the Bhuiyas in Bengal as well as in Assam cannot be minimised as we shall see in the following pages. Paying tribute to the Bhuiyas of Assam, N. Basu writes : "The whole of Assam still bears testimony to the power and glory of Bhuiyas who ruled the country for upwards of a century in the capacity of independent monarchs. Biswa Singh (the king of Kuch Behar) dealt the death-blow to the power of the older Bhuiyas living in western and central Assam, while those in Upper and Eastern Assam were crushed by the Ahom Kings."<sup>2</sup> As regards the Bhuiyas of Bengal, their attainments of independence can be well understood when it is remembered that till the close of the 16th century, Akbar's rule had not been firmly established in Bengal owing to a dangerous military revolt and persistent rebellions of the Afghans. While the imperial armies were dealing with the latter, the Bhuiyas of Bengal were able to maintain practical independence "amidst the swamps and rivers of the delta which were strong natural obstacle to invasion."<sup>3</sup>

So it is clear from the foregoing analysis that the number twelve as applied to Bhuiyas does not mean 'twelve', but an indefinite number. As Gait says, "It is not clear why the number twelve should always be associated with them. Both in Bengal and Assam whenever they are enumerated twelve persons are always mentioned but the actual names vary."<sup>4</sup> As has been noted earlier that no two lists of the Bhuiyas agree. Wilford and Bolochman have referred to the

<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> N. Basu, *Social History of Kamrup*, II, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer—Jessore*, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Gait, *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

Bhuiyas but they have not specified the names. Beveridge has also thrown light on the subject. Wise has enumerated the names of seven Bhuiyas but he has given accounts of only five. Those seven are : Fazl Ghazi of Bhawal, Kedar Rai of Vikrampur, Lakshman Manikya of Bhulua, Kandarpanarayan of Bakla or Chandradwip, Mukundaram Rai of Bhusna, Isa Khan of Khizrpur and Pratapaditya of Jessore. Of these seven Bhuiyas five were Hindus and the rest Muslim. Spanish Jesuit missionary Jarric has referred to only four of the Bhuiyas, to whom Wise has added three more. Manrique has referred to twelve Bhuiyas. But instead of giving the names, he has only referred to the territories of the Bhuiyas namely, Bengal, Hijli, Orissa, Jessore, Chandican, Midnapore, Kartabhu, Bakla, Salimabad, Bhulua, Dacca and Rajmahal.

The contemporary writers and travellers have left us lists of the Bhuiyas and no two lists agree. The main reason is that all the Bhuiyas did not exist at the same time. Many of the Bhuiyas who flourished on the eve of the Mughal invasion of Bengal, did not exist at the time of Manrique's travels in Bengal. Moreover, by the time Manrique came to Bengal, the descendants of many of the former Bhuiyas were deprived of territories and were reduced to misery. During the period between the fall of Karrani dynasty and the rise of the Mughal power in Bengal, the province was passing through rapid political changes. As a consequence there was change in the fortunes of the Bengali landlords. Even then there is no controversy regarding those Bhuiyas who flourished at the time of Mughal invasion and gained prominence. They were Isa Khan (Sonargaon), Pratapaditya (Jessore-Khulna), Kedar Rai (Sripur), Kandarpanarayan and Ramchandra (Bakla), Lakshman Manikya (Bhulua), Mukundaram Rai (Bhusna), Chand Ghazi (Bhawal), Bir Hamir (Bankura-Bishnupur), Kansanarayan (Tahirpur), Ramkrishna (Santol), Pitambar (Puthia-Rajshahi), Isa Khan Lohani and Usman (Orissa and Hijli).

In the present volume we propose to deal with only those Bhuiyas who played a prominent part in the movement of resistance against the Mughals.

**Difficulties of the Mughal Position :** Even after twenty-five years of persistent efforts, the Mughals could not make much headway in Bengal. As Wise writes : "The great military revolt and the stubborn resistance of the Afghans tried the stability of the newly established empire and it was only after repeated defeats



that the power of the malcontents was broken. . . . In eastern and southern Bengal, however, the contest was most prolonged.”

As has been told already that in Akbar’s time very few parts of Bengal were held in military occupation by the Mughal generals who failed to impose Mughal administration and peace in Bengal.

The great opponents to Mughal expansion in Bengal like Kedar Rai of Sripur, Isa Khan of Sonargaon and Masum Khan Kabuli, although disappeared from the political field in the life time of Akbar, other enemies stepped into their shoes and offered their opposition to the progress of the imperial arms. Most prominent of them were Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, Raja Pratapaditya, Bayazid of Sylhet, Raja Ramchandra of Bakla and Khwaja Usman. These prominent Bengal Bhuiyas, no doubt, “delayed the work of conquest by avoiding open and decisive engagements as far as possible and taking to guerilla warfare of making frequent surprise attacks with warboats at night.”<sup>1</sup> The issue would have been decided easily and shortly had there been an open engagement between the Bhuiyas and the Mughals. And this explains the cause of delay in conquering

Peculiar physical features of Bengal an impediment

and consolidating Bengal by the Mughals. The peculiar physical configuration of eastern Bengal and its numerous rivers and streams as well as the nature of the country rendered the task of conquest and consolidation extremely difficult for the Mughals. The adverse physical conditions made it very difficult for the movement of Mughal troops as well as for conducting military operations. The Mughal cavalry, proved to be invincible in upper India, became almost useless in eastern and southern Bengal where the only means of transport was boat. In the riverian regions of lower Bengal, it proved very difficult for the imperialists to recruit soldiers and provision for the troops. It also proved very difficult for them engaged in the inaccessible regions of Bengal to obtain reinforcements from the central government. Besides, the Mughals were weak in war-boats. The

Lack of war-boats

weakness constituted the main weakness of the Mughals in Bengal in the initial stage of their invasion, whereas many of the prominent Bhuiyas of Bengal possessed numerous war-boats and had at their disposal the services of Magh-Feringhi pirates. Hence in lower Bengal, the

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 246.

Mughals had to depend on the war-boats of their vassal landlords who were not expected to be loyal to the cause of the imperialists. Another difficulty which the Mughals had to face was the strictly limited period of campaign. No prolonged warfare was possible in Bengal during the monsoons when rivers of Bengal rose in floods and dislocated the entire land communications.

Another troublesome element, besides the local Bhuiyas, that harassed the Mughals in Bengal during the first half of the 16th century was the Portuguese free-booters commonly known as Feringhi pirates. Under the banner of the Magh (Arakanese) kings and the local Bhuiyas of Bengal, they often fought against the Mughals in Bengal.

“The Portuguese free-booters carried on their depredations into Bengal in close alliance with the local people of Chittagong commonly known as the Maghs, who were a race of equally competent seamen, equally cruel and adventurous and living a similar piratical life.”<sup>1</sup> The depredations of these free-booters constituted a grave threat to Mughal peace in Bengal and compelled the Mughals to fight on two fronts.

Evidently, the situation in Bengal at the beginning of the 17th century was not at all favourable for the Mughals. It was disunity and mutual jealousy in the camp of the Bengal landlords on the one hand and the enormous resources of the Mughal empire on the other, that ultimately decided the issue in favour of the latter.

**Mughal Campaigns under Islam Khan (1608-1613) :** For about two years after the accession of Jahangir, Bengal was ruled by three viceroys successively, namely Raja Man Singh, (1605-1606), Qutab-uddin Kokah (1606-1607) and Jahangir Quli Beg (1607-1608). On the death of the latter, Shaikh Alauddin entitled Islam Khan, the grandson of Shaikh Salim Chishti was appointed viceroy of Bengal. Jahangir writes in his memoir *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* : “I dignified Shaikh Alauddin, grandson of Shaikh Salim who had strong connections with me, with the title of Islam Khan and promoted him to the rank of 2000; he had grown up with me from his childhood and may be a year younger than I. He is a brave and well disposed youth and is distinguished in every way above his family. Till now he has never drunk intoxicating drinks and his sincerity towards me is such that I have honoured

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

him with the title of Son."<sup>1</sup> Islam Khan was specially charged to cope with the increasing confusion in Bengal. His youth roused grave misgivings in the imperial court, but he fully justified the trust reposed on him.<sup>2</sup> "Islam Khan was personally brave and temperate in his habits and showed great vigour, resoluteness and sincere devotion to duty. . . what characterised him most was his imperious manners, autocratic bearing and overpowering ambition."<sup>3</sup> He came to Bengal with the sole resolution to crush the independent pretensions of the Bengal zamindars and to impose a uniform administrative system over the entire province. To his credit, it should be admitted that he succeeded in realising his ambition to a great extent.

Upon his arrival at Rajmahal in June 1608, Islam Khan busied himself in settling his political programme as well as his plan of military operations. All the incompetent and dishonest officers were discharged and attempts were made to recover the war equipments taken away by the previous viceroys and generals. Islam Khan thought it correct that without proper consolidation of Mughal administration at the capital in Bengal, the task of conquest would be difficult. So immediately upon his arrival at Rajmahal, he sent a report to the emperor to the following effect : "The management of the affairs of this province should receive the attention of the officers of the State. The office of the Diwan should be given to a man of integrity. Ihtiman Khan who is one of the efficient officers of the imperial court or some one else as competent, should be sent as the chief officer of the fleet and the artillery. All the old officers who proved to be dishonest and treacherous and who are unfit for service in this province should be recalled to the court."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, on the advice of the emperor Wazir Khan, the former Diwan of the province and sons of Masum Khan and Lachi Khan Qaqshal who were the leaders of the mischief were sent to the court. Abul Hasan, a man of integrity and experience was appointed Diwan and Ihtimam Khan was appointed Mir Bahar or Admiral. The emperor also sent to Bengal all the nobles from Allahabad, Jaunpur and Orissa to strengthen the hands of Islam Khan.

Islam Khan's  
preliminary  
works

<sup>1</sup> *Tuzuk*—Eng. tr. R. and B., Vol. I, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> B. Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 247.

<sup>4</sup> *Baharistan*, Vol. I, pp. 3-4.

Islam Khan realised that Musa Khan, the foremost enemy of the imperialists and the acknowledged leader of the Twelve Bhuiyas should be crushed first, otherwise it would be extremely difficult to subdue his associates. That explains why Musa Khan stood foremost in the imperial plan of campaign in Bengal to be directed against. But the task was difficult as Musa's domain lay at a far distance from Rajmahal and the numerous landlords whose territories intervened between Rajmahal and Musa's capital at Sonargaon had to be subdued. Then there was the difficulty of maintaining land communications of the advancing imperial army with the headquarters at Rajmahal as well as there was the necessity of protecting the rear from the surprise attack of other enemies. Further, there was the necessity of establishing bases for garrisoning the imperial troops during the monsoons.<sup>1</sup> These were some of the difficulties that the imperialists had to take into account before undertaking campaigns against Musa Khan. Hence in the course of his advance from Rajmahal to Sonargaon, Islam Khan had to send numerous expeditions against the landlords of western Bengal to ensure the safety and security of the capital as well as to ensure undisturbed progress of the imperial army towards Sonargaon.

Having taken these measures, Islam Khan at the head of a large army supported by artillery and fleet under the command of Ihtiman Khan left Rajmahal on his Bhati campaign in the month of September-October, 1608. After Islam Khan had encamped at a place in the pargana of Gaur (Malda), he despatched a force of 2,000 cavalry and 4,000 infantry under the command of Shaikh Kamal to subdue Bir Hamir of Birbhum, Shams Khan of Panchet and Salim Khan of Hijli whose territories lay adjacent to each other. The imperial commander was instructed to give protection to those who would voluntarily submit. But if they refused to do so, their territories should be conquered. Shaikh Kamal first proceeded against Bir Hamir. The latter submitted to the imperial commander without resistance and led him to the territory of Shams Khan. Shams Khan offered resistance to the imperialists for a fortnight but at last was compelled to submit when the imperialists.

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 249.

threatened to storm his fortified post on the Darni hill. Shaikh Kamal next proceeded against Salim Khan. Although the associates of Salim Khan were bent on giving battle, the latter came from Hijli and submitted to the imperialists and offered peshkash. Shaikh Kamal conferred upon Salim Khan the right of administration of his domain and returned to Islam Khan with gifts and peshkash.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Islam Khan continued his march by way of Goash (Murshidabad district), crossed the Ganges and reached Alaipur (Rajshashi district) where he encamped for a few months. Immediately, after his arrival at Alaipur, Islam Khan sent Iftikar Khan with a company of local landlords against Raja Satrajit of Bhusna "with the instruction that if luckily Satrajit submitted, then he should be given the hope of the grant of his territory as jagir. . . otherwise his country should be left as a prey to the horse of the imperial karoris (revenue-collectors)".<sup>2</sup> Accordingly Iftikar Khan with an efficient force marched against Satrajit. The latter also prepared himself for battle with a large army and raised a high fort at Ata-Khal. He considered that Khal (a big flowing canal) as a place of defence. The Mughal troops avoiding the right side of the fort, advanced by another route up the canal where the water was shallow. Satrajit got alarmed and finding it difficult to continue resistance any more, offered his submission. Since that time Satrajit played a prominent part in the consolidation of the Mughal authority in Bengal and actively participated in the Mughal expedition against Kamrup.

From Alaipur, Islam Khan sent Mirza Nathan at the head of an adequate force to crush Mirza Mumin, son of Masum Khan, Dariya Khan, Madhu Rai, the zamindar of Kalsi—the associates of Musa Khan—who made a combined attack on the pargana of Sunabazu in the possession of the imperialists. This seemed to be the first occasion when Musa Khan became active and tried to harass the advancing imperialists. Mirza Nathan first marched to Chila and then advanced towards Chatmahar which he recovered without any fighting. Mirza Nathan, thinking it inexpedient to stay at Chatmahar, started for Shahpur situated up the river Atrai and waited there for fresh reinforcements from the Mughal viceroy. The latter despatched Iftikar Khan, Mubariz Khan, Bayazid Khan and Raja Satrajit with reinforcements to the assistance of Mirza Nathan. Upon the arrival of Mughal

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

reinforcements, the aforesaid associates of Musa Khan left their new stronghold and sought shelter with Musa Khan at Sonargaon.<sup>1</sup>

At the approach of the rains, Islam Khan kept the Bhati expedition in abeyance, made necessary arrangements for holding the territories subjugated so far and proceeded to Ghoraghat where he desired to spend the monsoons.

Musa Khan and his close allies took the opportunity of the rains to harass the imperialists. With the advent of the rains, all the imperial officers at Alapsingh (a pargana in Mymensingh) were ordered by Islam Khan to return to their respective jagirs and to make their arrangements to proceed to Bhati. Accordingly, the Mughal thanadar of Alapsingh Tuqmuq Khan came to his jagir in Shahzadpur on the bank of the Karatoya. Tuqmuq Khan was suddenly attacked by the local zamindar Raja Ray with a large number of war-boats and besieged the fort of Shahzadpur. But ultimately Raja Ray suffered a defeat and was driven away. Another imperial officer Mirak Bahadur was attacked in his jagir of Chandpratap (Manikgunj subdivision of Dacca district) by Binod Ray, Madhav Ray, Dariya Khan and other close allies of Musa Khan with the object of liberating Chandpratap and "thereby obliging Musa Khan by putting an impediment on the way of the imperialists in their advance towards Bhati".<sup>2</sup> They all came with a large army consisting of a fleet of boats, cavalry and infantry. Mirak Bahadur put up a vigorous resistance. But Musa's allies besieged the fort of Chandpratap which was about to fall. At such a juncture, Tuqmuq Khan, a Mughal commander, hastened to the rescue of Mirak Bahadur whereupon the besiegers took to flight.

After the monsoons, Islam Khan came out of the fortress of Ghoraghat, sent trustworthy officers of different places to recall all the imperial officers from the respective jagirs. The viceroy sent a large force under his brother Habibullah against Majlis Qutab, zamindar of Fathabad (Faridpur) who was a close associate of Musa Khan. He ordered Raja Satrajit to join Habibullah with his fleet, artillery and infantry in the expedition against Majlis Qutab. The imperial army under the command of Habibullah advancing along the Karatoya

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

laid siege to the capital city of Fathabad. Majlis Qutab was reduced to great straits and he appealed to Musa Khan for succour. The latter at once sent Mirza Mumin with a large force and a fleet of 200-boats to the assistance of Majlis Qutab. Mirza Mumin made repeated attempts on the camp of Habibullah but was ultimately repulsed. Mirza Mumin thereupon retraced his steps and came back to Musa Khan.

In the beginning of November 1609, Islam Khan left Ghoraghat and proceeding southwards along the Karatoya came to Balia. Here the viceroy settled the plan of attack upon Musa Khan. It was decided that the viceroy with the main army and the fleet would attack Musa Khan from the west by way of Jatrapur, while another division of the imperial army would proceed to Dacca, raise temporary fortifications and thereby would force Musa to fight on two fronts. The imperialists were under the impression that Musa's resources would not be equal to offer resistance simultaneously on two fronts. Accordingly, Shaikh Kamal, Tuqmuq Khan and Mirak Bahadur were ordered to proceed to Dacca with sufficient number of war-boats, musketeers and artillery. The imperial commanders shortly arrived at Dacca and made arrangements for the fortifications and got ready for the impending attack upon Musa's capital. "They proved a terror to Musa Khan and other Zamindars and became engaged in the construction of the fort of Dacca."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Mughal admiral Intimam Khan reached the Trimohani Khal Jagini and constructed three forts on the three 'mohanas'. From Balia, Islam Khan came to a place near the confluence of the three rivers, the Ganges (Padma), the Ichhamati and the Dhaleswari which has been identified by the Baharistan as Katasgarh.

It is to be noted that Musa Khan had a number of fortified posts in and around his capital. The centre of his military power was the strategic region south-east of Dacca at the conjunction of the Ganges (Padma), the Lakhiya and the Brahmaputra. His fort of Khizrpur stood at the confluence of the river Dulai and the Lakhiya "commanding the only water-route to Dacca from this side". Facing Khizrpur stood Katrabhu another fortified post of Musa on the bank of the river Lakhiya. There was another fortified post, Qadam Rasul opposite Narayanganj. Musa's capital Sonargaon was situated

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

three miles east of Khizrpur and nine miles south-east of Dacca. Sonargaon was both a fortified post and a flourishing port.<sup>1</sup>

At the confluence of the Ganges, the Dhaleswari and the Ichhamati stood Musa's fortified post of Jatrapur (about 25 miles west of Dacca). Besides these posts, Musa raised a series of fortifications in course of his war with the Mughals. Hence the task of subduing Musa Khan was a difficult one for the imperialists.

Upon the arrival of Islam Khan at Katasgarh, the latter was advised by the Mughal admiral Ihtimam Khan to undertake a naval campaign against Musa Khan at Jatrapur. Islam Khan at the advice of Raja Raghunath of Shushang, who was loyal to the imperialists, formulated the following plan for the campaign. Beginning from the 'mohana' of Katasgarh up to the 'mohana' of Jatrapur, they should construct block-houses on the entire land route and keep the infantry ready in them for the battle and the fleet should advance under the cover of these block-houses and make a combined assault of Jatrapur.<sup>2</sup>

Being apprised of the arrival of the imperial forces at the strategic point of Katasgarh, Musa Khan became alert and sent three of his ablest lieutenants, Mirza Mumin, Dariya Khan and Madhu Ray with 700 war-boats consisting of Kusas, Jaliya, dhura, bajra and khelna to defend the fort of Jatrapur.<sup>3</sup> For sometime Mirza Mumin continued to hold the fort along with Madhu Ray. But all of a sudden there developed a serious breach between Mirza Mumin and Dariya Khan ultimately leading to the murder of the latter by the former. This caused a great confusion in the enemy camp. Upon the news of this unfortunate affairs, Musa Khan with great haste came to Jatrapur with 700 war-boats and launched an immediate assault on the imperialists at Katasgarh.

After a day's fight, Musa Khan thought it necessary to raise another fortification at a strategic point on the bank of the river Padma at a close distance from the imperial camp. With this object in view Musa went with all his allies to that point called Dakchara. During the night he constructed a high fort and a deep trench on the bank of the Padma on which the imperial army was halting. "In Bengal, there were no ancient forts except those at Gaur, Akbarnagar alia

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



Rajmahal, Ghoraghat, Dacca and some other places of this type; but in the time of need, the boatmen quickly construct such a fort that even the expert masters are unable to build one like it within months and years.”<sup>1</sup> After raising such a fort at Dakchara and arranging the artillery and other means of defence, Musa stood ready for another battle.

On the other side, the imperialists decided to bring their fleet into the Ichhamati river moving under the protection of the bank, so that they might obtain their object without fighting.

Musa launches his attack upon the imperialists

The imperial forces were arranged thus, “on the other side of the mohana of Katasgarh, Abdul Wahid took his position with two hundred brave horsemen of Islam Khan and on this side of the river were the trenches of Khwaja Tabir Muhammad Bakshi, Ihtimam Khan, Mirza Hasan, Tahvildar of the navy and the artillery and the special trench of Islam Khan, situated close to one another. Towards its left, was the trench of Mutaquid Khan and to the left of Mutaquid Khan were those of the officers of Islam Khan. To the left of these were the trenches of Iftikar Khan and some of the subordinate mansabdars”.<sup>2</sup> While the imperialists were in this position, Musa Khan resumed his assault with great vigour the next morning. Heavy firing from Musa’s guns wrought havoc on the imperialists. Musa’s first shot broke Islam Khan’s all utensils and the crockery killing about 20 to 30 of his servants. The second shot of Musa wounded the standard-bearer of Islam Khan. Next followed a great commotion and the battle continued till mid-day. In fact Musa gained initial victory over the imperialists. The latter soon rallied and made a vigorous counter-attack. From the high bank, the Mughal artillery men began cannonading and killed many a man of the enemy’s fleet and several of the enemy boats were sunk. The son of Madhu Ray and a brother of Binod Ray, two close allies of Musa Khan were shot dead. After the sunset, both sides returned to their respective camp. Next morning the fighting was more severe. Madhu Ray and Binod Ray rushed with their boats towards the bank with a spirit of vengeance. Alighting from their boats, they offered a hand to hand fight with the imperial army. Every time the allies of Musa advanced and launched an attack, the imperial army met it by a counter-attack and drove them back. At the time of the third assault, the imperial army repulsed the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

enemy in such a way that they could no longer make any advance and many of them were drowned in the river. An amazing situation was created. Musa Khan was compelled to withdraw to Dakchara and Jatrapur.

Islam Khan next planned an assault on Dakchara. But the plan having failed, a naval attack was decided upon. This unnerved Musa and he thought of gaining time by offering peace overtures. Accordingly he sent his envoys. Through the intermediary of Iftikar Khan, Mutaquid Khan and Ihtimam Khan, Musa Khan came to the camp of Islam Khan. Islam Khan treated him sympathetically and bestowed upon him a robe of honour and honourably dismissed him. Musa Khan returned with a happy heart and urged upon his brothers (Daud Khan, Abdullah Khan and Mahmud Khan) to come to an agreement with the imperialists. He waited again on Islam Khan on two successive occasions. But ultimately Musa's peace-plan fell through and he got himself prepared for further fighting.

Islam Khan next planned to make assault on Jatrapur. He asked Shaikh Kamal, Tuqmuq Khan and Mirak Bahadur at Dacca to send 20 imperial war-boats with Mirak Bahadur to the mouth of the Kudaliya canal and ordered Shaikh Kamal to stay at Dacca and to make necessary arrangements for its defence. Islam began to cross the river Ichhamati with those 20 imperial boats. As soon as the news of this move of the viceroy reached Musa Khan, the latter at once rushed to the place with his war-boats. Before Musa's war-boats could reach, Islam Khan successfully crossed the river and fell upon the fort of Jatrapur. The attack was so surprise that Musa and his associates being unable to stand it, boarded their boats and evacuated the fort of Jatrapur "with a sorrowful heart and weeping eyes". This happened in early June, 1610.

Immediately after the conquest of Jatrapur, Islam Khan concentrated his energies on the capture of Dakchara. He ordered Abdul Wahid, Mirak Bahadur and Bayazid Khan to cross the river Ichhamati and to besiege the fort of Dakchara. The conquest of Dakchara proved to be a very difficult task because of the strong natural defences of the fort and the stiff resistance offered by Musa Khan. Through a newly constructed canal the imperial fleet began to move steadily. The enemies began to defend their fort by displaying their valour from

Musa's peace overtures

Fall of Jatrapur

Fall of Dakchara

the top of the ramparts and the towers. The war-boats of Musa had been mobilised on the other side of the river Padma and began cannonading from that side. The imperialists had to face severe difficulties. Serious efforts were made to enter the enemy fort and the infantry began to move forward under cover of their shields. In doing so, a good many of the imperial soldiers and boatman were killed. In this way, the imperial troops reached the environs of the fort-wall. But the deep-moat surrounding the fort offered a serious obstacle to the imperial troops. However the imperial boatmen at night covered up the moat and thus provided an easy passage for the troops. In the morning of 15 July, 1610, the imperial forces made their entry into the fort of Dakchara after a siege of more than a month.

The fall of Jatrapur and Dakchara dealt a severe blow to Musa's power and prestige. He suffered not only in men and war-boats but also in prestige. The disaster almost paralysed the confederacy of which Musa Khan was the guiding spirit. Musa's hold on his allies became shaken and desertion in his camp followed soon. His own brother Ilyas Khan's desertion was a tangible evidence of this fact. On the other hand, the conquest of so strongly-built naval stations like Jatrapur and Dakchara gave much confidence to the imperial 'nawara'. As a matter of fact, the invincibility of the navies of the local Bhuiyas broke down and henceforth they stood face to face with the equally strong imperial fleet.

Islam Khan's next move was to proceed to Dacca with the object of making direct assault on Musa Khan's capital Sonargaon. Islam Khan accompanied by Mutaquid Khan, Tahir Muhammad and other mansabdars started for Dacca. The fleet and the artillery were sent by the river Ichhamati under the command of Ihtimam Khan. Mubariz Khan, Mirak Bahadur, Bayazid Khan and Raja Raghunath were despatched by the right side of the fleet towards Sripur and Vikrampur under the command of Islam Khan's brother Yusuf Maki. The land force of Ihtimam Khan along with 500 of his own horsemen were despatched by the left side of the fleet towards Kudalia under the command of Abdul Wahid. By way of Kutharuiya, Balia (25 miles west of Dacca), the viceroy reached Patharghata (6 miles south of Dacca) followed closely by the imperial fleet under Ihtimam Khan. Islam Khan reached Dacca towards the end of July 1610.

At Dacca, Islam Khan settled a fresh plan of military operations and posted his officers at different strategic points. Ihtimam Khan and Mirza Nathan were instructed to take charge of the two forts of Beg Murad Khan situated on either side of the mouth of the canal called Demra. As ordered by the viceroy, Mirza Nathan and Shaikh Kamal raised fortress at Khizrpur and Kumarsar.<sup>1</sup> While the imperial officers were engaged in raising fortifications at different strategic points, Musa Khan's fleet and artillery men tried to harass them in every possible way. But everytime Musa's war-boats were driven back after short skirmishes. Mirza Nathan completed the construction of the fort in a short time. After placing the artillery in different positions, Mirza Nathan posted his subordinate officers in the following order: "Muhammad Khan was posted at the mohana of Khizrpur which is the confluence of the rivers Dulai and Lakhiya with 500 horsemen and a bridge was constructed at the mouth of the river with 'Katari' and 'Maniki' boats of the artillery. On its left, Shahbaz Khan Barij and a troop of 50 men were kept in charge of an entrenchment. And on their left Shaikh Sulayman Usmani and a group of 40 horsemen were posted. Behind them were stationed Ilahabad Khan Kasi and 70 horsemen. . . . Mirza Nathan made the Mosque (of Khizrpur) his headquarters with a large auxiliary force."<sup>2</sup> On the completion of this arrangement, Islam Khan held a council of war. It was decided that Ihtimam Khan should stay at Khizrpur and Mirza Nathan should be sent to Katrabhu against Daud Khan, Shaikh Rukn to Demra canal against Mahmud Khan and Abdul Wahid to Chaura against Bahadur Ghazi.<sup>3</sup>

The news of the imperial preparations put Musa Khan also in action and he made sufficient preparations for the second trial. He left his capital in charge of Shamsuddin Baghadadi and himself came out to face the imperialists making Lakhiya his main line of defence. He posted his three brothers Abdullah Khan, Daud Khan and Mahmud Khan respectively at the three strategic points, viz. Qadam Rasul, Katrabhu and Demra. Musa Khan concentrated his forces on the several strategic points on the left bank of the river Lakhiya. He

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan, I*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

retained a few posts at Sripur and Vikrampur and voluntarily abandoned the post at Narayanganj.

On 12 March 1611, the campaign against Musa Khan began. Mirza Nathan took the initiative. He made a night attack on Daud Khan's position at Katrabhu. Being apprised of the move of Mirza Nathan, Musa Khan sent his war-boats and they arrived at a time when Mirza Nathan was in the middle of the river with his elephants. Ihtimam Khan sent a squadron of 20 war-boats to the assistance of his son. The men of Mirza Nathan stationed in the fort above also began to fire. Every 'Kusa' struck by them was sunk. Mirza Nathan successfully crossed the river and hastily proceeded to attack the fort of Daud Khan. After a severe hand to hand fight, the imperialists occupied the fort of Katrabhu and Daud Khan was compelled to abandon the fort and flee to Musa Khan.

Emboldened at the brilliant success of Mirza Nathan, his father Ihtimam Khan came out of the river Dulai and passing through the Lakhiya proceeded to Qadam Rasul with his whole fleet against Abdullah Khan. Mirza Nathan sent a detachment for the defence of Katrabhu and himself arrived at a place near Ihtimam Khan. Tuqmuq Khan from other side joined in the assault on Qadam Rasul. Failing to withstand a three-cornered attack, Abdullah Khan abandoned Qadam Rasul. Emboldened at such an easy victory, the imperial fleet gave a chase to the enemy boats in a disorderly manner. The enemy fleet all of a sudden made a counter-attack, reducing the imperialists into a great plight. Mirza Nathan saved the situation by making an assault on Musa Khan's two fortified posts near the mouth of the Bandar canal. Musa Khan was taken by surprise and failing to withstand the assault he fled. Mirza Nathan thereupon advanced further and Alaul Khan evacuated his fort and joined Musa Khan's fleet. A large number of boats and artillery of Musa fell into the hands of Mirza Nathan in the fort of Alaul as well as in the river.

The successive reverses unnerved Musa Khan so much that he thought it unsafe to stay in his capital. So he with all his brothers and local landlords fled to Sonargaon and retreated to his home island of Ibrahim-pur, "with a burning heart and weeping eyes". He summoned Mirza Mumin from Sonargaon to come to him with all his

Fall of  
Katrabhu

Repeated rever-  
ses of Musa

Fall of Sonar-  
gaon

belongings. Haji Shamsuddin Baghdadi, Musa's chief officer, came to see Islam Khan and handed over Sonargaon to the imperialists.

The fall of Sonargaon (April 1611) practically sealed the fate of Musa Khan. His ultimate failure now remained only a question of time. The surrender of the capital to the imperialists completely disorganised his power of resistance and centre of authority and it marked the virtual acknowledgement of the collapse of his power. But

Musa's off-  
sives again

Musa could not be so easily subdued. He made several attempts to retrieve his position but each attempt brought further dishonour on him which hastened his final discomfiture. Musa's brother Daud Khan attempted to recover Katrabhu. He, having blocked the way of the Feringhi pirates, began to make his power felt. The Feringis therefore conspired amongst themselves and made an attack upon Daud Khan. The latter came forward to resist them. But the Feringis without recognising him shot him to death. This fatal misfortune completely upset Musa Khan. He at once sent all the landlords under his influence with a large auxiliary force against Mirza Nathan. "Owing to the disgrace of his repeated failures and the grief at the death of his valiant brother, he (Musa) writhed like a serpent in rage."<sup>1</sup> Musa Khan raised a number of fortresses with a view to attack Mirza Nathan's outpost. The latter having equipped a full force marched against Musa Khan and after a short skirmish, Musa's troops were put to flight. Musa, failing to achieve his object, retreated to Ibrahimpur "full of shame and disgrace".

After a week, Musa Khan made another assault on the Mughal outpost of Kudalia whose thanadar was Shaikh Rukn. The outpost was about to fall. Mirza Nathan came to the rescue of the thanadar. He ordered his artillery men to discharge big cannon against the enemy and to keep them out of the Bander canal until the arrival of the imperial fleet. Upon the arrival of the imperial fleet, the attack was made from three sides. The enemies, in fear of the imperial fleet, ran away to their boats. But Musa's troops rushed against the outpost of Mirza Nathan. A fierce engagement took place which gave rise to a great tumult. Mirza Nathan detached a body of 250 Afghans under the command of Shahbaz Khan Barij. But the enemy exhibited great courage and dexterity. "In short, a wonderful struggle ensued. The swords turned into saws and the world-consuming spark on

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

the steel helmets and the swords began to glitter on the heads of the valient warriors like glow-worms. The smoke of the artillery enveloped the sun with darkness and the bright day was transformed into a dark night.”<sup>1</sup> After a hot engagement, the enemy was driven back and an assault was made on their fleet. A large number of them were drowned.

Repeated failures led to the collapse of Musa’s power and the confederacy. One of the close associates of Musa Khan, Bahadur Ghazi surrendered to Islam Khan through Abdul Wahid. The viceroy received him well and assigned him his own territory as his jagir. His fleet was impressed into imperial service. After the defeat of Musa Khan and the submission of Bahadur Ghazi, Majlis Qutab of Fathabad, another associate of Musa, also made submission to the Mughals. “He made amends for his past conduct, and through the mediation of right-minded loyal persons, he offered his submission to Islam Khan.”<sup>2</sup> Majlis Qutub was also allowed to retain his territory as his jagir and his war-boats were seized.

Repeated failures and desertions on the one hand and steady progress of the imperial arms completely disheartened Musa Khan. He lost all hope in his struggle and found no other alternative for his safety than to surrender to the imperialists. Through the mediation of Shaikh Kamal and with the approval of Islam Khan, Musa Khan submitted with all his younger and elder brothers and his allies to Shaikh Kamal. Musa Khan along with his family and all his younger brothers were kept under strict surveillance at the viceregal court. The estate of each of them was given to them as jagir. Mahmud Khan, the brother of Musa Khan and all the zamindar-allies of Musa made amends for their past conduct and joined the imperial service. Musa Khan’s forts were demolished and his war-boats were all seized. Thus after a year of strenuous warfare from July 1610 to July 1611, the most formidable Bhuiya was reduced to complete submission. Musa Khan was released in 1618 through the intercession of Ibrahim Khan, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal. He was subsequently restored to liberty and he displayed faithfulness and loyalty in serving the Mughal government and distinguished himself in the Mughal conquest of Tippera.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Musa Khan, doubtless, played a glorious part in eastern Bengal against the imperial Mughals by organising a grand confederacy in that region. The author of the *Baharistan* has always associated the Twelve Bhuiyas with Musa Khan. He speaks of Musa's close association with a number of lesser landlords who were equally hostile to the Mughals. The lesser Bhuiyas fought against the Mughals under Musa Khan's inspiration and guidance. Musa Khan was understandably a great organiser. No other Bengali Bhuiya even before or after displayed such organising ability. Had he been closely supported by his contemporaries like Raja Pratapaditya, Khwaja Usman and Bayazid Karrani of Sylhet, the picture would have been otherwise. It was only when he became convinced after repeated failures that it would be utter futile to offer any more resistance to the Mughals, that he submitted. Truly speaking he fought to the last ray of hope. It was not the want of valour that led to his ultimate discomfiture. It was the superior war-technique and immense resources of the imperialists that accounted for his ultimate failure. Besides, repeated failures completely disorganised the confederacy and had shaken the confidence and loyalty of his zamindar-allies. Repeated desertions disheartened Musa Khan. He himself was a great fighter but not a sound strategist. He had none in his camp equal to his ability and zeal. While the imperialists had no dearth of competent and zealous warriors and commanders who had been fighting with the enemy under the superb leadership of Islam Khan. It cannot be denied that Musa Khan "inherited his father's (Isa Khan's) ability, ambition and military talents, though not his ripe judgment, cautiousness, prudence and foresight."<sup>1</sup>

**The Mughals and Raja Pratapaditya :** After the fall of Musa Khan, the Mughal viceroy Islam Khan next turned against Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore-Khulna. He was the son of Srihari, a kayastha writer in the service of Daud Karrani who gradually rose to be the latter's confident after the death of Ludi Khan, the worthy wazir of Daud. After the defeat of Daud Karrani in 1575, Srihari "who was Daud's rational soul went off rapidly" with his own wealth and the government treasury in his custody and set up for himself in the extreme south of the Khulna district and built a home there for his family. Pratapaditya's territory covered the greater part of what is now in-

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 245.



cluded in the Jessore and Backerganj districts. His capital was at the strategic point of the confluence of the Jumna and the Ichhamati rivers and was popularly known as Dhumghat.

After the arrival of the Mughal viceroy Islam Khan in Bengal, Pratapaditya was the first noted Bhuiya who indirectly accepted imperial vassalage. While Islam Khan was at Rajmahal, Raja Pratapaditya sent his youngest son Sangramaditya accompanied by his envoy Shaikh Badi with suitable presents to the viceroy. This was the first instance of disunity in the rank of the Bengal zamindars. Islam Khan did not fail to avail the opportunity. He accepted the presents and kept Sangramaditya behind as a hostage on the condition that Raja Pratapaditya would personally wait on the viceroy with his war equipments and assist the imperialists against Musa Khan to prove his loyalty.<sup>1</sup> Pratapaditya accordingly waited on Islam Khan on the bank of the river Atrai and offered his submission. The Mughal viceroy, with a view to draw the attention of other landlords of Bengal and also in consideration of the high position held by the Raja among the Bhuiyas, "bestowed honours upon him beyond measure and consoled and encouraged him."<sup>2</sup> On the first of the interview, Pratapaditya was presented with a horse, a grand robe of honour, a bejewelled sword-belt. Understandably, the Raja was converted into a loyal officer. An agreement was arrived at with the Raja to the effect that immediately after his return to his own domain, he should send his son Sangramaditya with 400 war-boats to join the imperial fleet and to stay with Ihtimam Khan, the admiral. The Raja himself at the time of the imperial expedition to Bhati should come by the river to Sripur and Vikrampur to join the imperial forces against Musa Khan and other landlords with 20 thousand infantry and war-boats to the total strength of 500 including those of his son and also one thousand maunds of gun-powder. In accordance with the agreement Raja Pratapaditya was confirmed in all his possessions and was granted the revenue of the district of Sripur and Vikrampur in lieu of his allowance.

But Raja Pratapaditya proved false to his agreement with the viceroy. He broke his pledge and did not join the imperial army against Musa Khan. Perhaps he calculated that the Mughals would

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

be overpowered by Musa Khan and his allies and he awaited the final outcome of the contest before joining the imperialists. But the complete discomfiture of Musa Khan, his submission and his close confinement at Dacca<sup>1</sup> (which was now the capital of Bengal) made Pratapaditya conscious of his guilt in not joining the imperialists as agreed upon. In fact, he had thus proved guilty of disloyalty and disobedience as a vassal. Hence Pratapaditya took the earliest opportunity to make amend for his folly and sent Sangramaditya with 80 war-boats to Islam Khan. But the viceroy assumed a strong attitude and was determined to punish the Raja by conquering his territory. Hence he refused to take the assistance offered voluntarily by the Raja. He entrusted those war-boats to the inspector of buildings and ordered him to wear them off by carrying loads of timber, thatches, bricks and stones for the buildings.

In order to punish Pratapaditya and to subjugate the territory of Jessore, Islam Khan organised an expedition under the command of

Expedition against Pratapaditya	Ghiyas Khan. About the middle of December 1611, Ghiyas Khan marched out for the expedition. The Mughal army was comprised of one thousand picked cavalry of Islam Khan and Lachhmi Rajput, the
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nephew of Bahadur Gurah, a large force of the mansabdars and other officers, five thousand match lock-men, three hundred fully equipped imperial war-boats and artillery which were in charge of Ihtimam Khan and the fleet of Musa Khan and of his brothers and other landlords. In short, the imperial army marched against the enemy from all the different camps of the officers.<sup>2</sup>

The imperial army marched towards Jessore along the Bhairab and the Ichhamati and reached a place named Salka near the confluence

Pratapaditya's preparations	of the Jumna and the Ichhamati where the first engagement with the Jessore army took place. Upon the arrival of the imperial army near the territory of Jessore, Pratapaditya strongly fortified his capital and posted a strong army and fleet under expert officers including
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<sup>1</sup> After the suppression of Musa Khan, Islam Khan finally made Dacca, the capital of Bengal—a measure dictated by military considerations. The eastern frontier of Bengal was then exposed to the ravages of numerous war-like invaders; the Ahoms from Assam raided the north of the district, while from the south the Maghs in alliance with the Portuguese pirates plundered the country and rendered all the waterways unsafe. Dacca was convenient for dealing effectively with the Bhuiyas. Hence Dacca was made the capital and named Jahangirnagar—*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Dacca, pp. 298-299.

<sup>2</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 121.

Feringis and Afghans. He sent his eldest son Udayaditya to Salka with 500 war-boats under the command of Khwaja Kamal and one thousand horsemen and forty war-elephants under Jamal Khan. After his arrival Udayaditya raised a lofty fort there and the trenches around it were arranged in such a way that one side of the fort became protected by the river, the other two sides by an extensive marsh. Having water on all sides of the fort, Udayaditya took his position with confidence. He arranged his fleet in the river and the infantry in the fort.

On the news of the preparations of the Jessore army, Ghiyas Khan in consultation with Mirza Nathan decided to lead the assault in the following order : "The fleet will proceed by the middle of the river; one regiment will march by one side of the river and another by the other side to cooperate with the fleet from above the banks and thus the fort of the enemy will be attacked. If the enemy comes out of the fort to fight, then our object will be attained. Otherwise we also will raise a fort in front of the enemy's and will occupy their fort by driving away their fleet with the aid of our artillery."<sup>1</sup> Mirza Nathan was instructed to go over to the other side of the river. Bahadur Beg and Buzah Khur were assigned to Lachhmi Rajput. A squadron of the imperial fleet was kept in charge of Lachhmi Rajput. With the rest of the fleet, Ghiyas Khan proceeded to other side of the river. Mirza Nathan with the troops at his disposal crossed the river during the night. In the morning they moved for the battle by both sides of the river with the fleet between them.

The Jessore army did not take the initiative. They did neither let loose their boats nor did they come out to offer battle. Hence Ghiyas Khan and Mirza Nathan arranged ten boats each as advance-guard and ordered the boatmen of the rest to raise two forts on either side of the river opposite the fort of Udayaditya. While the construction work of the fort was progressing, all of a sudden Udayaditya appeared on the scene with the main Jessore fleet along with Khwaja Kamal in the van. Khwaja Kamal was commanding floating battery, gun-boats and other kinds of war-boats. Udayaditya took his position in the centre with other kind of war-boats mostly heavy in weight and bigger in size. Another Jessore admiral, Jamal Khan was instructed to defend the fort with soldiers and elephants at his command and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

to assist the Jessore fleet from the high bank if the imperial fleet made attempts to overpower the Jessore fleet.

As soon as Udayaditya made a slight move with his fleet towards the imperialists, the war began. The Jessore army and fleet gained an initial victory over the imperialists. The twenty imperial boats posted as vanguard offered a stiff resistance. Khwaja Kamal instantly advanced and surrounded the ten imperial boats and drove them towards the side of Ghiyas Khan. The ten imperial boats were about to be captured and the main imperial fleet was driven a few miles from Salka. But the imperialists soon gathered strength and succeeded in checking further advance of the Jessore fleet. Shortly, the imperialists seized a few boats of the Jessore fleet. The boatmen and admirals of the Jessore fleet who had anchored their boats could not remove them and being unable to stand the attack, jumped into water. But other squadrons of the Jessore fleet surrounded the imperial fleet on the side of Mirza Nathan. The latter instantly made an assault on the Jessore fleet and Mirza's troops began to shower arrows upon the enemy fleet. Mirza Nathan advanced to a position where he had left the fleet of Khwaja Kamal behind him and the boats of Udayaditya were in his front and flank. Shortly a tumult arose in which Udayaditya suffered a severe reverse and the Jessore admiral Khwaja Kamal was shot dead.

Although the boatmen of the Jessore fleet did not cease showering arrows and shots like hailstones, Udayaditya became nervous at the death of Khwaja Kamal and took a speedy flight. The imperial and the zamindari boats although engaged in plundering the boats of the enemy, a few of them chased Udayaditya. The latter was about to be captured when from among the flying boats of Udayaditya, some of them carrying Feringi soldiers proved loyal to their master and cast anchor and thus threw obstacle on the advance of the imperial boats. However, Mirza Nathan came to the rescue of the imperial boats and overpowered the Feringis. Udayaditya came to a narrow part of the river where the advance of the flying boats was obstructed. He at once jumped down on his 'kusa' and his boatmen rowed it ahead of all the other flying boats and thus he narrowly escaped being captured.

Forty-two Jessore boats escaped with Udayaditya. The rest of the fleet and the artillery fell into the hands of the imperialists. After the disappearance of Udayaditya from the scene, Jamal Khan abandoned the fort of Salka and made a hasty retreat. Mirza Nathan took possession of the fleet and the artillery and Ghiyas Khan entered the fort. A large booty, the greater part of the Jessore artillery, and the fleet fell into the hands of the imperialists.<sup>1</sup>

This is the full account of the battle of Salka given by Mirza Nathan who took a leading part in the battle. This battle ended the first stage of the war between Raja Pratapaditya and the Mughals which led to important consequences. The Mughals secured a valuable base of operations in their further war against the Jessore prince. The battle would have been decisive had not the imperialists succumbed to the temptation of plundering the Jessore boats and equipments after the defeat of Udayaditya. On the other hand, the defeat at Salka practically broke down the naval arm of Jessore. The terrible loss that the Jessore fleet suffered could not be replenished. In fact, the main Jessore fleet with the ablest of Jessore admirals like Khwaja Kamal and Jamal Khan came to participate in the battle. Hence a few war-boats were left to offer any effective resistance to the imperialists. Moreover, the death of Khwaja Kamal deprived the Jessore fleet of any admiral of importance.

Although the defeat of the Jessore fleet in spite of their superiority in number seems to be surprising, yet the causes are not far to seek.

“It was a naval battle only in name and it was really decided on land. The Mughal archers and musketeers posted securely on the high banks of the Ichhamati, wrought havoc on the helpless sailors of the enemy fleet passing below them. Further the very number of the Jessore fleet and the heavy build of some of the war-boats, particularly the ‘ghurabs’ proved to be a cause of their defeat. They were cramped for space and could not sail freely and in proper order in the Ichhamati, which was not only narrow but full of bends and turns. The sudden death of the admiral completed the disaster.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the dexterity of the Mughal boatmen in erecting temporary forts and the daring enterprise of Mirza Nathan were no less responsible for the

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, pp. 128-130 ; Ramram Basu, *Pratapaditya*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>2</sup> *Dacca Univ., History of Bengal*, II, p. 267.

disaster. Mirza Nathan's daring enterprise "broke the unity and discipline of the Jessore fleet".<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile another imperial army under the command of Saiyid Hakim was despatched against Raja Ramchandra of Bakla, son-in-law of Pratapaditya, with the two-fold object, viz. to conquer that kingdom and thereby to prevent Ramchandra from actively assisting his father-in-law. Saiyid Hakim, Saiyid Kasu, Mirza Naruddin and Raja Satrajit with a large fleet, three thousand match lock-men, twenty war-elephants and other necessary equipments of war were deputed to this expedition. The imperial force advancing with great zeal reached Bakla within a short time.

Although the mother of Ramchandra was not at all in favour of resisting the imperialists, Ramchandra under the advice of his Brahmin minister decided upon resistance, raised a fort opposite the imperialists, and fought courageously for a week. But ultimately, the fort was stormed and the imperialists marched into the heart of the country. The mother of Ramchandra who was all along opposed to war, now threatened to take poison unless her son suspended hostilities and made peace with the imperialists. Under such pressure, Ramchandra tendered his submission. Under the instruction of Islam Khan, Raja Satrajit escorted Ramchandra to Dacca and Saiyid Hakim proceeded to join the imperial army engaged in war against Pratapaditya. Islam Khan granted some parts of Bakla to Ramchandra for the maintenance of his fleet, the rest was distributed among Mughal revenue officers and jagirdars. Ramchandra was under strict surveillance and was entrusted to imperial officers in the same way as was done in the case of Musa Khan and other Bhuiyas.<sup>2</sup>

The news of the surrender of Ramchandra and the approach of another Mughal division from the side of Bakla stirred Pratapaditya into fresh activity. He saw no other alternative but to gird up his loins for a second trial of strength by constructing a fort at a convenient place far from the capital. "Accordingly, with the purpose of keeping the imperialists engaged in a false negotiation during the time of the completion of the fort and with the desire of concealing the fact of the construction of the new fort, from them, he came out of the river Jessore through a canal to the fort of Budhan and sent

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

his envoy to Mirza Nathan."<sup>1</sup> Pratapaditya through his envoy sued for peace. But the imperialists became suspicious of the Raja's motive and hence dismissed his envoy instantly.

Upon the failure of his plan, Pratapaditya at once busied himself in constructing a fort five miles north of his capital near the confluence of the Khagarghat canal and the Jamuna. Here he raised a strongly fortified fort like that of Salka. He gathered innumerable boats ready for battle in his dockyard and himself remained within the fort with a large number of cannon, a large army, elephants and a large number of infantry equipped for battle.

Pratapaditya's preparation alarmed Ghiyas Khan. He asked Mirza Nathan to go over to the right side of the river and to attack Pratapaditya's new fort. Ghiyas decided to make assault on the fort from the left side of the river. Early in the morning of a day at the beginning of January 1612, the imperialists marched by either banks of the river Ichhamati with the fleet between them with a strong determination of capturing the fort of Pratapaditya. The Jessore fleet was anchored at the mouth of the Jamuna. The Jessore fleet could not withstand the attack of the imperial fleet and artillery and the firing of the imperial troops from the two banks and hence made a hasty retreat towards the fort. Marching in this way, the imperial fleet as well as the fleet of the vassal landlords came up to the mouth of the river. At this stage Pratapaditya's soldiers started heavy cannonading from the fort which for sometime put a stop to the further progress of the imperial army. The river Jamuna became an impediment to the advance of the imperial commander Ghiyas Khan. Mirza Nathan and Lachhmi Rajput with their troops had to play a prominent part in the battle. They reached the side of the Khagarghat canal and resumed their attack. Mirza Nathan crossed the canal by means of elephants protected by boats followed by the imperial fleet. This plan attained great success. As Mirza Nathan started crossing the canal, the Jessore artillery resumed firing on him. The Jessore artillery was thus kept busy in meeting the attack of Mirza Nathan. Hence they could not come to the assistance of the Jessore fleet when the latter was suddenly attacked by the imperial fleet. As a result, the imperial fleet overpowered the Jessore fleet. The imperial fleet

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

then became free to come to the aid of Mirza Nathan who soon crossed the canal and rushed upon the enemy's fort. The centre of the fleet under an officer of Mirza Nathan reached a place below the fort. A hand to hand fight ensued and a large number of men were wounded and killed on both sides. Raja Pratapaditya failed to resist any more and hence he took to flight. Mirza Nathan took possession of the fort.

The second defeat practically ended the Jessore campaign. Pratapaditya "with a dejected heart" fell back to Jessore and joined Udayaditya. Jamal Khan, who had so long served

Submission of his master loyally, did not go back with his master  
Pratapaditya and joined the imperialists. The Raja conferred  
with his son and came to the decision thus "when

we are surrounded by the imperial army from two sides and when the imperial officers will rush upon us, the Feringis who never ceased even in time of peace to attack and plunder the territory of Jessore, will now become audacious and will make greater attempts than before to ruin our territory. Nothing will be gained (by us). Therefore, it is better that I should voluntarily submit to the imperial officers and present myself before Islam Khan to see what turns out and how my fortune works. After that if we are aided by fortune, an attempt for the preservation of our territory will be made."<sup>1</sup> In fact, Pratapaditya expected to get better terms from Islam Khan by voluntary submission. Accordingly he accompanied by his personal attendants waited on Ghiyas Khan and offered his submission. Ghiyas Khan treated the Raja honourably and gave him a horse and robe of honour. The Raja met other Mughal generals and officers who equally treated him honourably. It was decided that the Raja himself would proceed to Dacca with Ghiyas Khan and all the imperial officers would stay at the camp of Khagarghat till they received advice from the viceroy as to the future course of action.

Accordingly Ghiyas Khan escorted Pratapaditya to Dacca where the latter rendered submission to Islam Khan. Pratapaditya's expectation of securing favourable terms was not realised. Islam Khan adopted a very stern attitude. He put the Jessore King in chains and wholly annexed his kingdom to the Mughal empire. Imperial officers were appointed to collect revenue from Pratapaditya's territories.

The last days of  
Pratapaditya

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 137.



Pratapaditya's sons were taken prisoners and sent to the imperial court wherefrom they were released a few years later through the intercession of the Bengal viceroy Ibrahim Khan. The last years of Pratapaditya's life are obscured in mystery. According to one tradition, on way to Delhi as prisoner, Pratapaditya put an end to his life "by swallowing some poison he kept, preferring death to the ignominy of being paraded in an iron cage through the streets of Delhi."<sup>1</sup>

According to Bharatchandra's *Annadamangal*, Pratapaditya "was flayed alive" at Benares on way to Delhi as a prisoner. "There may be some truth in the tradition that the Jessore King was kept confined in an iron cage at Dacca and died at Benares on way to Delhi as a prisoner."<sup>2</sup>

**The Mughals and Khwaja Usman :** Islam Khan now took up arms with all seriousness against Khwaja Usman, the last of the prominent Bhuiyas of Bengal. Khwaja Usman has been described as the most romantic figure in the history of medieval Bengal who excelled all his contemporaries in personal valour, dash and in his love of freedom, "all of which combined to inspire and sustain him in his defensive warfare against the expanding Mughal power till his death in the field of battle".<sup>3</sup> He was the son of Isa Khan Lohani and nephew of Qutlu Khan of Orissa. Being driven out from Orissa by Raja Man Singh, Usman established himself in the region east of the Brahmaputra in the Mymensingh district with the city of Bokainagar as his stronghold. He gave a lot of trouble to Raja Man Singh. Often he was chased by Man Singh but every time he eluded Mughal subjection. All the time he maintained a close alliance with Isa Khan, Musa Khan of Sonargaon, the Afghan chiefs of Sylhet such as Bayazid Karrani and Anwer Khan of Beniachang and other refractory landlords of Bengal. He had two fortified strongholds, one at Hasanpur and the other at Egarasindur (Mymensingh) both situated on the eastern bank of the Brahmaputra. But in comparison with Musa Khan or Raja Pratapaditya, Usman's political authority was limited in extent. His military resources were also limited and in naval armaments also, he was no match for Musa Khan or Pratapaditya. However, his tenacity

Establishment  
of Usman's  
political  
power

<sup>1</sup> O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer—Jessore*, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 269 (Foot-note).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

of purpose was immense and to the last day of his life he remained a serious menace to Mughal peace in Bengal.

In the year 1593 Raja Man Singh, after subduing the Afghans of Orissa, assigned their surviving chiefs Sulaiman and Usman fiefs in the Faridpur district. But soon Man Singh changed his mind and cancelled their grants and recalled them to his camp. At this Usman rebelled and by way of Satgaon came to eastern Bengal and established himself in the Mymensingh district. Since that time he continued giving the Mughals troubles from time to time. Till the end of Akbar's regime, Khwaja Usman remained not only unsubdued but also a standing block in the way of imperial expansion in the region east of the Brahmaputra.

After the conclusion of the war with Musa Khan, Islam Khan turned against Khwaja Usman as well. But before the expedition was sent, he made an effort to win over Usman. Accordingly, he sent a message to Usman through a courier. The latter, in an eloquent speech, attempted to convince Usman and his Afghan followers of the futility of measuring strength with the imperialists and the little chance of shaking off the Mughal yoke. The Mughal envoy further tried to impress upon Usman "that united in faith of Muhammad, it was their duty, as the inferior power, to bend to and endeavour to assimilate with the conquerors; that nations rise and fall by destiny; that for six hundred years the Afghans had ruled Hindusthan with despotic sway; but that fate had now consigned—the sceptre to the hands of the Mughals; they ought, therefore, to bear their lot with humility and resignation and bend down in submission to the Divine decree."<sup>1</sup> The appeal of the Mughal envoy was of no avail and Usman remained adamant in his stand. As Stewart writes: "The haughty Osman Khan, at the head of 20,000 Afghans, considered himself as a second Alexander and breathed nothing but war and independence."<sup>2</sup>

The viceroy having failed in his attempt to win over Usman by peaceful means, lost no time in making preparations to subdue him. He fitted out numerous and well-appointed army, the command of which was entrusted to the viceroy's two favourite officers, Shaikh Kamal and Abdul Wahid. The land force consisted of 1,000 picked cavalry and 5,000 musketeers with 300 war-elephants. The imperial

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

fleet was composed of 3,000 imperial boats besides the fleet of Musa Khan and other loyal landlords. Towards the beginning of October 1611, the imperial expedition was despatched. The imperial commanders were ordered to march with all the loyal zamindars and the officers deputed to this expedition, were instructed to begin operations from the side of Hasanpur (on the eastern bank of the Brahmaputra). They were further instructed to make a breach in the bank of the Brahmaputra so that its water might inundate the land and reach a high level round the fort of Bokainagar and thus make it convenient for the fleet to proceed up to the fort to attack it. Shaikh Kamal and Abdul Wahid reached Hasanpur from Dacca in three days with the entire land army. Ihtimam Khan and Mirza Nathan with the fleet joined the land army proceeding by way of Egarasindur. The viceroy ordered Ghiyas Khan to march from Alapsingh to join the expedition at Shah Bandar and to take the chief command of the army. Ghiyas Khan, in accordance with the order, arrived at Shah Bandar. The Mughal plan of assault on the fort of Bokainagar was delayed due to the delay in the assembling of the entire forces. However, upon the arrival of the fleet at Hasanpur the imperial boatmen began to cut the bank of the Brahmaputra. They made all efforts to inundate the plain with the water of the river. But meanwhile, the flood water so quickly subsided that it became almost impossible for the fleet to reach the fort of Bokainagar. Hence the idea had to be abandoned.

The plan of naval attack upon Bokainagar having failed, an assault by land was decided upon. But there was difficulty of suitable land route and facilities for transport. Without recalling the army, Islam Khan instructed them to march by raising block-houses one after another up to the fort of Bokainagar. Ghiyas Khan encamped on the bank of the Brahmaputra and joined the fleet.

At this stage an incident happened which though seemed to be promising in the beginning resulted in a serious conspiracy against the Mughal government in Bengal as a whole and against Islam Khan in particular. The fall of Musa Khan and the submission of other refractory landlords in quick succession to the imperialists, gravely alarmed the landlords of Sylhet, prominent amongst whom was Anwar Khan of Beniachang. He was the leader of a group of landlords of Sylhet and in no way less powerful than Musa Khan. When Anwar Khan saw

Anwar Khan  
of Beniachang  
joins the imperia-  
lists

that the imperialists were bent upon crushing Khwaja Usman, he felt helpless and paid a visit to Islam Khan and thus promised : "If I am ordered to proceed with an army, I will go from this side and raise an insurrection among the people of Sylhet and the partisans of Usman so that no aid can be rendered by them to Usman."<sup>1</sup> Islam Khan was very much pleased and accepted the services of Anwar Khan and his brothers. The viceroy then sent Islam Quli, a slave of Baz Bahadur on his own elephant to take the command of the fleet and Anwar Khan was granted his territories as his jagir. Although Anwar Khan and his brothers were treated very kindly, he was not at all satisfied at being made subordinate to Islam Quli. Hence Anwar Khan again became disturbed. On arriving at Egarasindur, he entered into a plot with Mahmud Khan and Bahadur Ghazi who were in the imperial camp. The object of his plot was to make a junction with Usman and to proceed to Dacca where Islam Khan was to be captured and Musa Khan and other landlords were to be released. Anwar Khan assured Mahmud Khan and Bahadur Ghazi thus : "I will imprison Islam Khan at Dacca. Musa Khan will also be released with his family and thus the whole Bhati will be freed and will again come under the sway of the zamindars."<sup>2</sup> The imperial commanders accepted these terms of Anwar Khan and Usman was informed accordingly. Usman, being satisfied with the promises of Mahmud Khan and Bahadur Ghazi, became busy in preparing for an assault on the imperialists at Hasanpur. Anwar Khan invited Mubazir Khan, Islam Quli and other officers to a banquet. But he only succeeded in entrapping Islam Quli and Raja Ray, zamindar of Shahzadpur with whom he fled to Beniachang. But the plan of marching upon Dacca could not be realised. The secret activities of Mahmud Khan and Bahadur Ghazi soon became divulged. Islam Khan took immediate steps against the conspirators. He put Mahmud Khan and Bahadur Ghazi in chains. Next he sent Raja Satrajit along with a large number of loyal zamindars in pursuit of Anwar Khan. The viceroy himself marched with the imperial officers and reached Tok wherefrom he sent Mubariz Khan against Anwar Khan. Having taken these steps, Islam Khan ordered the imperial army to resume their march against Usman.

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Baharistan*, Vol. I, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 106.

secured from the imperial court the subahdarship of Orissa for the former.

Having completed the preparations, Islam Khan sent Shujaat against Usman in his new citadel of Uhar, in the southern extremity of the Sylhet district. The imperial army consisted of five hundred picked cavalry and four thousand match lock-men; and besides the elephant-force of Ihtimam Khan, the whole of the fleet and artillery in charge of Ihtimam Khan along with the navy of Suna Ghazi, the zamindar of Sarail were despatched to the assistance of the army.

Expedition  
against  
Usman

The command of the imperial force against Bayazid was ultimately entrusted to Shaikh Kamal. The force against Bayazid consisted of the officers like Shaikh Kamal, Mubariz Khan, Tuqmuq Khan, Mirak Bahadur and Mir Abdur Razzaq, and equipments of war like four thousand match lock-men, one thousand picked cavalry, one hundred imperial elephants and the fleet of Musa Khan and his confederates.

Expedition  
against  
Bayazid

Starting from Dacca, Shujaat Khan first made his halt at Khizrpur where Islam Khan came to bid farewell to the former. Shujaat Khan proceeded in quick marches and from every stage

Shujaat Khan  
proceeds via  
Egarasindur

he wrote to Ihtimam Khan insisting on his speedy arrival. After six marches from Dacca, he reached Egarasindur and made forward marches from that place. Meanwhile Ihtimam Khan and Mirza Nathan arrived at Egarasindur from Khizrpur. Shujaat Khan crossed the river Pankiya with the land force and waited for the arrival of the imperial fleet under Ihtimam Khan. Shortly Ihtimam Khan and Mirza Nathan joined the expedition. The imperial army encamped at the fort of Sarail, seven miles north of Brahmanbaria. As it was thought not advisable for the fleet to proceed any further, it was left at Sarail in charge of Malik Husain and the land force resumed its march along the banks of the Meghna towards the northeast and reached the fort of Taraf in nine marches. The army halted there for a day. Shujaat Khan left a regiment of his own at Taraf under the command of one of his officers and he himself at the head of the main army resumed the march and came near the hill-pass of Tupia. The first engagement with Khwaja Usman was expected at this strategic point as it was being guarded by Usman's brother Khwaja Wali. Hence Shujaat Khan thought it expedient to raise a strong fort below the pass and

to guard it with vigilance so that Khwaja Wali, who was staying at the fort of Tupia, might not come down by any trick. Mirza Nathan was entrusted with the task and he completed the construction of the fort with deep trenches around. Big cannons were posted on its walls and towers and he remained ready for battle during the whole night. Towards the day-break, Mirza Nathan sent a detachment of his troops to terrorise the enemies. Khwaja Wali, being terrified went to join his brother Usman evacuating the mountain fort which was a great obstacle to the advance of the imperialists. Mirza Nathan's party advanced without obstacle and reached the front of the trench made by Wali on the top of the hill-pass where a regiment had been posted. This regiment also left the place with Khwaja Wali.

The imperialists occupy the fort of Tupia

Thus Mirza Nathan had little difficulty in occupying the vacant fort of Tupia (February 1612). Commenting on the cowardice of Khwaja Wali, Mirza Nathan writes, "he (Wali) gave up a post which could be defended even by an old woman, not to speak of iron-clad warriors and artillery men". In fact, the cowardly retreat of Khwaja Wali caused a great harm to Usman and paved the way for a breach in his rank.

Shujaat Khan halted for a day at the fort of Tupia. On 4 February 1612, the imperialists resumed their march and formed their battle array in the following order : the command of the centre was entrusted to Shujaat Khan along with Mutaquid Khan and Ihtimam Khan in order that they might take a strong position, the command of the vanguard was entrusted to Mirza Nathan supported by his able comrades like Sayid Adam, Sayid Husaini, Mustafa and others ; the command of the right wing was entrusted to Iftikar Khan with his own troops; the command of the left wing was given to Kishwar Khan with his own troops; the command of the advance-reserve was given to Shaikh Qasim, son of Shujaat Khan with the instruction to help the vanguard. Having thus formed the battle array, the imperialists resumed their march. At this stage, with the purpose of sending an auxiliary force to the aid of Shujaat Khan, Islam Khan sent Mukarram Khan to take charge of the Thana of Bhawal and he ordered Abdus Salam to proceed to Shujaat Khan with a force of one thousand picked cavalry.<sup>1</sup>

The battle array of the imperialists

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, Vol. I, p. 171.

At the news of the steady progress of the imperialists towards his capital, Usman became active with his sons and arranged his army in the following order. He personally took the command of the centre of the army with a force of two thousand picked cavalry, five thousand infantry and forty war-elephants. Khwaja Wali was entrusted with the command of the left wing with one thousand cavalry, two thousand infantry and thirty elephants. Shir Maidan, a slave of Usman was given the command of the right wing with a force of seven hundred Afghans, one thousand infantry and twenty war-elephants. The vanguard was assigned to his other two brothers, Khwaja Malhi and Khwaja Ibrahim with a force of one thousand five hundred cavalry, two thousand infantry and fifty war-elephants.<sup>1</sup> Having arranged his army thus, Usman marched from his stronghold of Uhar and in two marches arrived at Daulambapur in the "forty-four Parganas", (Pargana-i-Chowallis) and entrenched there. "The place was well chosen. It was at a distance of a mile and a half from the camp of the imperialists and separated from the latter by a big quagmire, which was fringed by a large and thick row of areca-nut tree. By means of planks fastened to these trees, a sort of raised battery was made on which guns were mounted. From this well-fortified position behind the quagmire, Usman bade defiance to the imperialists."<sup>2</sup>

Shujaat Khan clearly understood the difficulty of the situation. Usman made his position almost impregnable and put the invaders in an inconvenient position. Hence efforts were again made to prevail upon Usman to voluntary submission. Upon the advice of Iftikar Khan, Shujaat Khan sent a message to Usman to the effect that "the thread of mutual understanding was still in his hands. If he would agree even at that extreme end to submit personally to the Emperor with a clean conscience, he would be pardoned and a respite would be granted to him. For the tranquility of himself and the well-being of the common people as well, he should send (as hostage) one of his sons or one of his noble brothers along with all the tuskers of his elephant-stud. The imperial diwans should also be allowed to prepare the permanent rent register of his domain in order to send it to the sublime court. He should consider it as an everlasting blessing to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 275.

accept the rank of 5000 in lieu of his allowance which had been fixed by royal command.”<sup>1</sup> Usman was assured that what he had done so far would be pardoned and upon his voluntary submission, the imperialists would retreat. An Afghan, named Shihab Khan Ludi, an officer of Iftikar Khan was sent to Usman with the message. The author of *Baharistan* writes : “when he (Ludi) came to Usman, he (Usman) writhed like a snake. . . he wanted to delay (in sending the reply) by means of tricks and deception”.<sup>2</sup> Understanding the insincerity of Usman, the Mughal envoy came back and reported the matter to Shujaat Khan thus : “His (Usman’s) arrogant head is not prepared to submit. He speaks of nothing but war.”<sup>3</sup>

The attempt to disarm Usman peacefully having again failed, the imperialists had no other alternative than war. On 12 March 1612, hostilities commenced. The imperialists took the offensive by attacking the right wing of Usman under Shir Maidan. A false rumour that the enemy right was about to fall on the imperialists created confusion in the rank of the imperialists. A party of the imperial vanguard and the army of the left wing which was under the command of Kishwar Khan turned towards the left and rushed upon the enemy. The other imperial warriors turned to the right and advanced towards the areca-nut trees. Usman took the advantage of this confusion. The battle began on the side of the marsh. Some of the warriors of Usman crossed the marsh. Shaikh Achha and Mustafa fell upon them. Then Mirza Nathan brought down the cannon to fire upon the enemy. But as the royal regiment became mixed up with the enemy, he could not do so. The imperial artillery posted at a distance of a little over a mile was fired from every side. This created a great confusion in the camp of Shaikh Achha and his troops. Shaikh Achha received a shot and fell in the battle-field. Mustafa unable to stand ran away.<sup>4</sup> At such juncture Iftikar Khan rushed out of the centre of his army, with forty-two horsemen and fourteen foot-soldiers and joined his comrades in the battle. Iftikar Khan crossed the marsh and fell upon Khwaja Wali who was posted on the left side of his brother Usman. After a short skirmish Khwaja Wali was about to be routed if Usman had not come to his aid. Usman advanced forward with an army of three thousand brave warriors and war-

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<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, Vol. I, p. 174 ; *Tuzuk*, I, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Tuzuk*, Vol. I, p. 210.



elephants. He made a violent charge upon Iftikar Khan. The latter offered a strong resistance. His comrades were one by one cut to pieces and at last, Iftikar Khan himself was slain. The autobiography of Jahangir states : "Iftikhar Khan, the leader of the right wing was in no way a remiss in attacking and sacrificed his own life. The band that was with him fought to such a degree that they were all cut to pieces."<sup>1</sup>

While right wing of the imperial side was broken up by Usman, the left wing under Kishwar Khan which made a vigorous attack on the right wing of Usman, fared no better.

Shir Maidan, the commander of the right wing of Usman, rushed upon Kishwar Khan. A group of the imperial vanguard, e.g. Sayid Adam, Sayid Husaini and Suna Ghazi having been separated from the centre, had got mixed up in the company of Kishwar Khan. The first assault was made on Sayid Adam. The latter was cut to pieces. Suna Ghazi fled away without offering any fight. After this, Usman's right wing fell upon the regiment of the imperial left wing under Kishwar Khan. After a short skirmish Kishwar Khan was slain. Shir Maidan pursued the fleeing army of Kishwar Khan. Thus attacked by Shir Maidan, the imperialists came out in large number and began to fire upon the enemy. The imperialists under Mirza Nathan made a violent counter-charge. Shir Maidan, failing to stand the attack, took to flight and joined Khwaja Mumriz, son of Usman.

But the cause of the imperialists appeared to be lost. Their right wing and left wing had been completely disorganised and its commanders were slain. The imperial vanguard also suffered a severe set-back. The centre under the command of Shujaat Khan remained the only ray of hope for the imperialists. A severe fighting ensued in which the Afghans succeeded in breaking the centre of the imperialists and isolating Shujaat Khan. Usman made a serious attempt to capture or kill Shujaat Khan with the help of his raging elephant named Bakhta. "Shujaat Khan perceiving his (Usman's) intention, spurred on his horse and wounded the elephant with his spear; he then drew his sword and inflicted four other wounds on the animal but the furious beast, only more irritated by his wounds, made a desperate charge and overthrew the general's horse. Shujaat however

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<sup>1</sup> *Tuzuk*, Vol. I, p. 210.

extricated himself from his steed and bravely standing his ground wounded the elephant twice on the fore leg which brought him upon his knees; the chief (Shujaat) then plunged his dagger into the animal's trunk which completely disabled him."<sup>1</sup>

When the imperialists had thus been reduced to great straits and the victory of the Afghans seemed almost certain, an unforeseen incident marred the brilliant prospect of the Afghans.

Usman fatally wounded While desperately advancing against the imperialists and cutting to pieces numerous imperial troops,

suddenly a Mughal horseman Shaikh Abdul Jalil inflicted a mortal wound on Usman. Shaikh Jalil seeing the miserable plight of his master Iftikar Khan, shot an arrow at Khwaja Usman in such a way that it pierced through his left eye and reached his brain. Usman in order to conceal his wound from the sight of his followers, drew out the arrow from his eye with his own hand but in doing so, he lost his right eye also and became totally blind. Still Usman remained undaunted. He covered his eyes with a handkerchief and proceeded towards Shujaat Khan. But very quickly he lost his speech, became senseless and died. The news of the death of Khwaja Usman was kept concealed and his body was carried to the camp. "But the life and soul of the struggle for independence was gone and the Afghans, deprived of their great leader continued desultory fighting till the end of the day and then decided to flee to Uhar at night."<sup>2</sup>

What actually happened is this that as the news of the death of Usman was kept secret, the Afghans were still continuing the war.

The Afghans fly to Uhar The warriors of both sides were extremely tired of this hard battle. Arrows and cannon were kept showering from both sides like hailstones. The hand to hand fight continued throughout the whole day.

In the midnight a great confusion occurred in the Afghan camp. The cause of this confusion was this : "Khwaja Mumriz, Khwaja Malhi, Khwaja Ibrahim and Khwaja Daud in consultation with Wali Mandu Khel, minister of Usman and the Sarhangs decided to carry the dead body of Usman to Uhar and after murdering the wives and daughters of Usman, to take their oath of allegiance to Mumriz and renew the war."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly they sent away all their wounded and useless

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 191.

elephants and despatched their entire artillery and infantry and fled to Uhar in great precipitation.

The imperialists, who were unaware of this favourable turn of affairs, returned to their camps dejected and disheartened due to their heavy losses in men and equipments and passed the night with great vigilance. "From evening till two and a half pahar of the night, the soldiers spent their time without a wink of sleep with great caution and vigilance."<sup>1</sup> Early in the morning (13 March 1612) some of the imperial soldiers who were engaged in discharging guns slowly advanced towards the Afghan camp with a view to get some information but found no trace of the enemy. The flight of Usman was announced but the imperialists were still uncertain whether Usman was dead or alive. Although the adherents of Shujaat Khan expressed their desire to give a hot chase to the Afghans, Shujaat Khan did not think it advisable for want of sufficient number of troops and equipments.

Thus the battle of Daulambapur, though began well for the Afghans, ultimately ended in disaster to them. The battle evinced the military superiority of the Afghans to the imperialists both in generalship and tactics. The imperialists could not stand anywhere against the Afghan offensive and the elephants of the Afghans wrought havoc on the imperialists. It was the Providence that came to the rescue of the imperialists. Usman fell in battle 'struck by the arrow of fate' which left the Afghans leaderless.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile Islam Khan sent a detachment of one thousand cavalry to Shujaat Khan under the command of Abdus Salam which relieved the dejected imperialists greatly. Upon the arrival of the reinforcement,<sup>3</sup> the imperialists resumed their march and having traversed ten miles, they encamped at a place. The boatmen raised a fort and dug trenches all around the place so that the Afghans might not make any surprise attack. The advance of the imperialists demoralised the Afghans further. Wali Mandu Khel, Minister of Usman came with Khwaja Yaqub, the youngest son of Khwaja Usman with proposals of submission to Shujaat Khan. He reported the details of the death of Khwaja Usman and proposed on behalf of Khwaja Wali the terms of surrender. But Wali Khel's proposal was not taken seriously by the adherents of Usman. The burial of Usman having been

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Tuzuk* the reinforcement consisted of 300 horse and 400 musketeers. (p. 212.)

completed, the Afghans, high and low gave the turban (dastar) and the sword of Usman to his son Mumriz and decided to resume hostilities. But the project did not work due to new divisions and dissensions amongst the Afghans and their scramble for power. Khwaja Usman's bold leadership so long preserved unity in the camp of the

Afghans. But with his death, the unity and solidarity among them departed. The machinations of Wali to pull down Mumriz from leadership ruined the cause of the Afghans. Wali had already shown

his incompetence by his hasty retreat from the fort of Tupia as also in the battle of Daulambapur. Now he intrigued with his father-in-law Wali Mandu Khel to overthrow Mumriz and to have the leadership.

With this object in view, Wali with the advice of his father-in-law sent a message to Mumriz thus, "you are still a minor and the imperial armies have defeated us. The Afghans are losing their heart. You send the turban and the sword of Usman to me and wait and watch the course of events for a few days".<sup>1</sup> Although Mumriz was young

in age, he was efficient and wiser than Khwaja Wali. But for the sake of unity and solidarity in the Afghan camp, he voluntarily abdicated the leadership in favour of his uncle Khwaja Wali with the following message :

"The day Khwaja Usman became a martyr that very day I thought that the kingdom and its kingship had disappeared. I had no desire for it and you forced me to accept the turban and the sword. Now let him by all means be happy with the turban and the sword whoever has a hankering after them."<sup>2</sup> The abdication of

Mumriz did not improve the situation. Khwaja Wali, the new leader, failed to secure the support of the Afghans and even of his brother Malhi. Instead of endeavouring to win over his brothers and the soldiers to fight against the imperialists, he imprisoned Malhi by a strategem. This tactless conduct of Wali disgusted the Afghan chiefs and they refused to obey the command of Wali. Ambitious and

unscrupulous Wali did not hesitate to betray the cause of the Afghans for his own selfish ends. At the cost of his own independence and the interests of his clan, Wali ultimately betrayed his clan and opened

negotiation for peace with the imperialists.<sup>3</sup> Wali Mandu Khel accompanied by Yaqub, the younger brother of Mumriz, waited on

Wali surrenders to the imperialists

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide*, *Baharistan*, I, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

the Mughal generals near Uhar and prayed for a week's time to bring in Khwaja Wali and the Afghan Chiefs for tendering submission. Shujaat Khan and the imperialists granted them the respite sought for on condition that they would surrender all the elephants within two days. Upon the acceptance of this condition by Wali Mandu Khel, Shujaat Khan said that Khwaja Wali should retain with him twenty-five female-elephants for the purpose of carrying his goods and family members while the rest of the elephants should be immediately handed over to the imperialists. Shujaat Khan dismissed Wali Mandu and Yaqub with much civility and honour.

On the eleventh day of the month of Muharram, 4 March 1612, Khwaja Wali, Khwaja Mumriz, Khwaja Malhi, Khwaja Ibrahim, Khwaja Daud, Khwaja Yaqub and the Sarhangs and Sardars like Wali Khel, Asad Khan, Jalal Khan, The Afghan chiefs' surrender to Sujaat Khan Nasir Khan and other Afghan chiefs waited on Shujaat Khan and the imperial officers. Shujaat Khan treated each of them well. Every one of the sons, brothers and nephews of Khwaja Usman was given a suitable robe of honour; each sarhang and sardar was given a pair of shawls and each of the Afghan heroes was rewarded with a shawl. In all four hundred officers, great and small, were given gifts of honour.<sup>1</sup>

After the complete surrender of the Afghan chiefs and the family members of Khwaja Usman, Shujaat Khan started for Dacca. He left Mughal detachments at Uhar, Taraf and Sarail. The imperial army reached Dacca on 8 April 1612. Shujaat Khan came to pay respects to Islam Khan at the latter's palace along with imperial officers and Khwaja Mumriz, Khwaja Wali and his brothers and nephews. Islam Khan's refusal to grant audience to Usman's brothers and sons pained Shujaat Khan very much. However on the request of Shujaat Khan, robes of honour were presented to Usman's brothers and sons. The domain of Khwaja Usman was annexed to the Mughal empire. Usman's army was disbanded and his sons and brothers were kept in close confinement. The report of fall of Usman and the annexation of his domain greatly delighted emperor Jahangir. He heaved a sigh of relief that "through the unstinted mercy of the Almighty Giver, Bengal had been freed from the disturbance of Usman the Afghan".<sup>2</sup> The importance of the war with Usman may be evident

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Tuzuk*, I, p. 214.

from the following statement of the emperor, "when the news first came of the killing of Usman, it appeared to be a joke, but by way of ascertaining the truth or falsehood of the words I took an omen".<sup>1</sup> As a reward for his meritorious services, the emperor promoted Islam Khan to the rank of 6000 personnel, honoured Shujaat Khan with the title of 'Rustom of the age' as well as increased his rank by 1000 personnel and horse. He also increased the rank of other imperial officers according to the measure of their services.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Khwaja Usman, the most romantic figure in the history of medieval Bengal, fell and with his fall the Afghan resistance to Mughal imperialism almost collapsed. In spite of Usman's personal valour and superior tactfulness, the causes of failure of the Afghans are not far to seek. The numerical superiority and abundance of war equipments of the imperialists accounted much for their failure. The Afghans were handicapped on this score from the beginning. The fall of Bokainagar during the first phase of the war gave a serious blow to Usman's power and prestige. In fact, the fall of Usman's capital cooled down the military zeal of Usman's close associates like Bayazid Karrani of Sylhet and Anwar Khan of Beniachang. It greatly reacted on the unity and solidarity of the Afghan camp. The cowardice and incompetence of Khwaja Wali, Usman's brother, and his hasty retreat from the strategic hill-post of Tupia gave the imperialists a great advantage over the Afghans. Usman and his Afghan warriors carried everything before the imperialists but it was the Providence that came to the rescue of the imperialists. Usman fell in the battle 'struck by the arrow of Fate'. With his death the unity and solidarity of the Afghans was gone and scramble for power among the brothers and sons of Usman ruined the cause of the Afghans. Ultimately the betrayal of Khwaja Wali completely undid the life's work of Khwaja Usman. Lastly, it is to be noted that it was never possible for Khwaja Usman and his Afghan associates to continue their war of independence against the imperialist power like the Mughals for an indefinite period with their meagre resources.

**The Mughals and other Bhuiyas :** Three redoubtable enemies of the Mughal peace like Musa Khan, Raja Pratapaditya and Khwaja Usman had no doubt disappeared from the political arena of Bengal, but there still remained others to be crushed for ensuring peace and political stability.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

As has been already said that the defeat and submission of Musa Khan and his confederates followed by the imperial expedition against Khwaja Usman alarmed the Afghan chiefs of Sylhet of whom the most prominent were Anwar of Beniachang and Bayazid Karrani. Anwar Khan not only made his submission to Islam Khan but also agreed to join the imperial campaign against Usman. As a reward, the Mughal viceroy allowed Anwar Khan to hold his territory in fief. But Anwar Khan proved false to his agreement and engineered a plot with two Mughal officers to form a junction with Khwaja Usman and to imprison Islam Khan at Dacca. The project however failed and Anwar Khan fled to Beniachang.

After the fall of Bokainagar in November 1611 followed by the retreat of Usman to Sylhet, an imperial expedition was sent against Anwar Khan. Islam Khan personally came to Tok and sent Mubariz Khan against Anwar Khan. When Anwar Khan carried away Raja Ray and Islam Quli, two Mughal officers, and arrived at Beniachang, he kept them in confinement and prepared himself for battle. He strengthened his fortress and stationed his war-boats in battle array. The vassal landlord Raja Satrajit proceeded against Anwar Khan. The latter offered a naval battle. In two or three engagements he offered stiff resistance to the imperialists and made a violent charge upon Raja Satrajit. The Afghan troops of the Raja displayed a great zeal and made a counter-charge. Neither side gained any decisive victory. Meanwhile the reinforcements under Mubariz Khan arrived and put Anwar Khan to great straits. Failing to stand any more, Anwar Khan sued for peace. He ultimately surrendered to Islam Khan through the mediation of Raja Satrajit and Mubariz Khan. Anwar Khan was kept in close confinement and Beniachang was annexed to imperial domain.<sup>1</sup>

After imprisoning Anwar Khan and making satisfactory arrangements for the administration of Bokainagar, Islam Khan sent a strong expedition under the command of Haji Shamsuddin Baghdadi against Pahlwan, zamindar of Matang. Baghdadi was instructed to raise a strong fort between Matang and Taraf where Mumriz, son of Usman and his brother Malhi still remained unsubdued. Shamsuddin Baghdadi having traversed from stage to stage arrived at the destina-

Conquests of  
Matang and  
Taraf

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, p. 113.

tion within a few days. He raised a lofty fort with deep trenches and waited there for the war. He began to plunder the adjacent villages. Apprised of the rapid advance of the imperialists, Khwaja Mumriz and Khwaja Malhi, son and brother of Usman respectively, decided to lead an expedition against the fort of Haji Shamsuddin. They left a small detachment in the fort of Taraf and after a march of six 'pahars', they made an assault upon the imperial fort. A fierce struggle ensued which continued for the whole day. The imperial troops continued showering arrows and bullets from the fort. The Afghans rushed towards the gate of the fort by placing an elephant in their front. They made a forced entry into the fort and on three occasions the imperialists drove them out by offering a hand to hand fighting. In the fourth assault, the Afghans failed to stand and hence retreated. After their retreat, Haji Shamsuddin marched against Pahlwan of Matang with the expectation that the fall of Taraf would convince Pahlwan of the futility of war with the imperialists. But Pahlwan, a valiant warrior and having a contingent of valiant troops and a battalion of sincere brothers, came out with great boldness to resist the invaders. In the vicinity of Matang, a great battle ensued. Pahlwan made violent charge upon Haji Shamsuddin and in the encounter the latter was killed. Haji Shamsuddin's adopted son Qurban Ali collected together the dispersed troops of his father, made a counter-charge upon Pahlwan and won victory. Pahlwan lost his life and his followers took to flight. Thus in rapid succession Taraf and Matang came into the possession of the imperialists.

Sylhet was the stronghold of the Afghan chieftains of whom Bayazid Karrani was most prominent. He was a close ally of Khwaja Usman and after the fall of Bokainagar to the imperialists, Bayazid gave Usman shelter in his domain. It has already been said that in order to prevent Bayazid from assisting Usman, an imperial expedition against the former was fitted out under Shaikh Kamal along with the expedition against Usman under Shujaat Khan in 1612. After marching with great caution, Shaikh Kamal reached the vicinity of Sylhet and began a series of plundering raids in order to terrorise the inhabitants to submission. The imperial general gradually reached the bank of the river Surma at some distance from the fort of Sylhet, the capital of Bayazid. Meanwhile fresh reinforcements reached Shaikh Kamal which strengthened the imperialists. Apprised of the heavy mobilisation of the invaders, Bayazid sent his younger brother

Conquest of  
Sylhet and fall  
of Bayazid



Yaqub at the head of a large Afghan contingent to raise a fort on the bank of the river Surma with a view to check the advance of the enemy. Shaikh Kamal appointed Satrajit to raise a block-house with a big trench in front of Kadamtala, a place outside Sylhet. In the course of the construction of the fort and the trench, the Afghans started heavy cannonading upon the advancing invaders. After fortifying the trench, Satrajit and other landlords tried to cross over to the other side of the river under cover of their artillery. After labouring for a week, they at last succeeded in crossing over to the other side and fell upon the fort of Yaqub. Yaqub had to evacuate the fort. About the weakness of the Afghans in these two battles, Mirza Nathan writes : "The weakness of the Afghans in these two battles at the trench and the fort on the other side of the river was due to a rumour which had spread that Khwaja Wali had retreated from Tupia to Uhar and Khwaja Usman had failed to stand the attack of the imperialists. Therefore, they were in a vacillating state as to whether they should surrender to the imperialists or not. In short, they became impatient and irresolute and lost their hold on both sides of the river."<sup>1</sup> But when the rumour of Usman's discomfiture was found to be baseless, Bayazid and Yaqub resumed their hostilities with greater vigour. Their position was further improved by the arrival of a large reinforcement from the Raja of Kachar. The Afghans came out early in the morning and fell upon Raja Satrajit. They attacked the imperial fort and the bank of the river Surma on this side of Sylhet which resulted in a great loss of men on both sides. Shaikh Kamal became very much perplexed. But just at this moment twenty-two imperial officers of Bihar with large equipments and provisions arrived on the spot which removed the anxieties of the imperialists. Hostilities were resumed with great vigour on both sides and the Afghans put Shaikh Kamal to great straits. All the time, the Afghans grew audacious and began to send repeated messages to Shaikh Kamal thus, "we still promise you and all your comrades, great and small, a safe passage. If you desire your welfare, then come out of your fort and go you all back on foot to Islam Khan with your bare bodies, leaving all your elephants and equipments here".<sup>2</sup> When the imperialists were greatly pressed, the news of the death of Khwaja Usman came as a great blow to Bayazid and his comrades. The Afghan resistance practically collapsed and Bayazid sued for

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Baharistan*, I, p. 195.

peace. With this object in view, Bayazid sent his brother Yaqub to Shaikh Kamal. The latter sent back Yaqub to Bayazid in the company of Raja Raghunath of Shushang with the instruction that Bayazid should come personally and make an unconditional surrender. Shaikh Kamal received Bayazid with much civility and presented him and his brothers robes of honour. Shaikh Kamal assured Bayazid of imperial favour. Thus assured, Bayazid handed over all his elephants to the imperial commander and went back to his fort. Mubariz Khan was left in command of the imperialists in Sylhet and the administration of Sylhet was entrusted to one of Shaikh Kamal's trusted adherents. Having completed these arrangements, Shaikh Kamal escorted Bayazid and other Afghans to Daeca. Islam Khan treated Bayazid with greater severity than in case of Usman's sons and brothers. Sylhet was formally annexed to the Bengal subah. Bayazid and his brother were deprived of their personal liberty and kept in close confinement.<sup>1</sup> Sylhet was turned into a Mughal military post which formed a convenient base of operations against the Hindu kingdoms of the north-eastern frontier tract. A Mughal faujdar with a number of revenue collectors were immediately appointed in Sylhet and thus Mughal administration got a firm footing there.

Bhulua, in the district of modern Noakhali, was the seat of another prominent Bhuiya, Ananta Manikya. The history of Bhulua is obscure. Its history is closely connected with that of Tippera on the north-east and that of Arrakan on the south-east and Bakhriganj on the south-west. Ananta Manikya was the son of Lakshman Manikya.

Expedition  
against Ananta  
Manikya of  
Bhulua

In that age Bhulua's strategic importance was immense as commanding the route to and from Arrakan particularly Chittagong. The Magh Kings of Arrakan along with Feringi pirates constituted a serious menace to Mughal peace to such an extent that Islam Khan thought it prudent to annex Bhulua to imperial domain and to turn it into a Mughal base of operations against the Maghs and Feringis. "Two fortified posts in the conquered tract (Bhulua), one at Bhulua, the capital and the other at Jagdia on the eastern frontier, supplied the Mughals with the convenient bases of operations against the Arakan King and the Magh and Feringi pirates who so frequently raided Bengal."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, pp. 196, 208.

<sup>2</sup> *Dacca Univ., History of Bengal, II*, p. 238.

Islam Khan while engaged in hostilities with Musa Khan, despatched Haji Shamsuddin Baghdadi, Mirza Nuruddin, Mirza Isfandaryar and others with immense equipments and five hundred cavalry of his own special force totalling on the whole four thousand cavalry, three thousand match lock-men and fifty elephants under the command of Abdul Wahid against Raja Ananta Manikya. The imperial commander was instructed to subjugate the territory of Ananta Manikya. If he tendered voluntary submission, in that case he should be given hope of imperial favours and brought to Islam Khan's presence; but if the Raja preferred to oppose the imperialists, he should either be brought in chains or his head cut off and forwarded.<sup>1</sup>

Apprised of the rapid advance of the imperialists, Raja Ananta Manikya strongly garrisoned Bhulua, raised fortifications on his frontiers and appealed to the King of Arrakan to come to his aid. The Arrakan King Salim Shah responded. In fact, the advance of the imperialists towards the south-eastern frontier of Bengal naturally alarmed the King of Arrakan. Hence he proceeded to the aid of Ananta Manikya against their common foe. With the warm support of the Arrakan King, Ananta Manikya leaving a strong garrison at his capital, advanced northward and raised a strong fort on the bank of the Dakatia river. Meanwhile the invaders on reaching a place opposite this new fortification of Ananta Manikya commenced war. Abdul Wahid stormed the fort. Heavy fighting continued the whole day which resulted in heavy loss in men and equipment on both sides but without any decision. Small imperial detachments were sent out in all directions to plunder the neighbouring regions. Islam Khan sent necessary reinforcement one after another. But nothing proved effective. Meanwhile Mirza Yusuf Barlas, the chief minister of Raja Ananta Manikya, seeing no hope of success against the imperialists, sent an envoy to Abdul Wahid praying for protection and offered himself to serve the emperor. Upon the acceptance of the offer, Yusuf Barlas waited on Abdul Wahid and submitted to the imperial officers. Yusuf Barlas was given a 'mansab' of five hundred and was impressed into the imperial service. This unexpected development terrified Ananta Manikya greatly and he left the fort and came back to his capital. The Raja, failing to withstand the repeated assaults of the invaders, escaped to the Arrakan kingdom. The imperialists pursued him till he crossed both the Feni rivers. A large number of

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<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 97.

elephants and a huge booty fell into the hands of the invaders. Thus Bhulua was annexed to the Subah of Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

*Conclusion:* Thus by 1613 the prominent Bengal landlords who enjoyed for sometime independent position in the province were thoroughly suppressed by the imperial Mughal power and their domains were annexed to the subah of Bengal. The subjugation of the Bhuiyas of Bengal made it at last possible for the imposition of Mughal peace and introduction of subah system of government in the province. It was only after the thorough conquest of Bengal that it became henceforth possible for the imperial power to adopt a forward policy both in the north-eastern and south-eastern frontiers.

The causes of the success of the Mughals against the Bengal landlords are not far to seek. As in the case of the Afghans in the previous regime, the Bengal zamindars could not offer any united front against the imperialists. In eastern Bengal, Musa Khan to some extent organised a confederacy with the lesser Bhuiyas. But with his ultimate discomfiture, the entire confederacy collapsed and his close associates submitted to the imperialists without hesitation. The fall of Sonargaon dealt a mortal blow to the pretensions of the Bengal zamindars. Raja Pratapaditya's voluntary submission to the imperialists on the arrival of Islam Khan in Bengal weakened the freedom movement of the Bhuiyas on the one hand and encouraged the imperialists in their aggressive mission on the other. The voluntary submission of Raja Satrajit of Bhusna and Raja Raghunath of Shushang and their devotion to the imperial cause demoralised the landlords of Faridpur and Mymensingh in their opposition to the imperialists. The lack of unity among the Bhuiyas of Bengal was fully utilised by the imperialists to their advantage. This lack of unity was early noticed by Raja Man Singh. Islam Khan's 'divide and rule' policy paid a good dividend to the imperialists. He played off the zamindars, big and small, one against the others with assurances of imperial favour and reward sometimes in the form of territories with a view to prevent a unified and concerted resistance until all of them were finally deprived of their independence and reduced to vassalage.<sup>2</sup> "The absence of the spirit of nationality, the bitter feeling of rivalry, jealousy and hostility amongst the zamindars on the one side and the skilful separatist or 'divide and rule' policy initiated by the Mughal viceroys on the other

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 234.

side, account for this political tragedy.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, enormous material resources of the imperialists accounted much for their ultimate victory. It was never possible for the Bhuiyas to fight the imperialists with their meagre resources for an indefinite period. Although at the beginning, the imperialists were weak in war-boats, gradually the war-boats of the vanquished landlords made up that deficiency and the imperial fleet offered a fitting challenge to the fleet of the Bengal zamindars. Lastly, the organising ability of the imperial viceroy Islam Khan and the zeal of the imperial commanders, doubtless, accounted much for their final triumph.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

## CHAPTER 3

### REVOLTS AND REBELLIONS IN THE IMPERIAL CAMP IN BENGAL

The defeat of Daud Karrani in 1575 and his submission to the Mughal viceroy Munim Khan at Cuttack did not immediately bring peace and orderly Mughal government in Bengal.

Introduction That province remained for many years a scene of confusion and anarchy. Afghan resistance to the imperial advance assumed a dangerous proportion at this stage. But a series of revolts and rebellions in the imperial camp throughout Akbar's reign and early part of Jahangir's reign posed no less a serious challenge to the imperial government in the eastern provinces. When orderly government in Bengal was still far off, the rebellion of the imperial soldiers and officers sometimes threatened the very existence of the newly established Mughal government in the province. In general terms, the causes of unrest among the imperial officers and soldiers posted in Bengal varied like the climate of the province: arrogance of the governors, hazardous campaigns in the regions unfamiliar to the Mughals, desperate resistance offered by the Bengal zamindars, prospect of wealth, etc. Moreover, long distance from Delhi and the difficulties of communications with the imperial court often encouraged the imperial officers and soldiers in Bengal to raise standard of rebellion on flimsy pretexts. Religious factionalism also played a great part in creating dissensions in the imperial camp in the early years of Akbar's region.

The first defection in the imperial camp occurred while the imperial army had been proceeding towards Orissa against Daud Karrani.

First defection Near Mandaran in Hughli district, the sudden death of Muhammad Quli Barlas, an imperial commander, caused disorder in the Mughal camp and the troops refused to continue the jungle campaign. Raja Todar Mal, who was leading the army, failed to pacify the troops. He, thereupon, requested Munim Khan, the imperial governor of Bengal, to send money to satisfy the troops.<sup>1</sup> The hazard of the campaigns

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, II, pp. 172-173.

disheartened the imperial troops and they clamoured for some sort of agreement with the Afghans. Munim Khan convened a council of war. Some preferred peace to war, some preferred war, but reflected upon the difficulties of the roads. At last by the exertions of Raja Todar Mal and the firmness of Munim Khan, all agreed to fight. This was the first occasion when the imperial troops revolted against the supreme command although it was quickly suppressed.

After 1575, the Mughal victory over the Afghans might have been easier had not the Mughal officers in the eastern provinces risen to rebellion. A number of imperial officers posted at different outposts in Bengal and Bihar resorted to all sorts of crimes in accumulating wealth and as Abul Fazl says that their only thought was "how to carry away their pile of gains from this pestilential climate". Moreover, the attempts of the newly arrived civil officers from Delhi to check the illegal gains of the old officers pushed the latter into despair and as a consequence rebellions broke out in the imperial camp in Bihar and Bengal. This unhappy situation, doubtless, encouraged the Afghans from time to time to anti-Mughal activities. Meanwhile,

Munim Khan's  
death: Terror  
in imperial  
camp, 1575

the death of Munim Khan, the supreme Mughal commander, followed by the outbreak of an epidemic brought further miseries to the Mughals in the eastern provinces. Terror seized the surviving Mughal officers in Bengal which further intensified the former lack of union. In fact, consolidation of imperial power in the eastern provinces was still far off and the Mughals were scatteredly situated at different outposts without any strong bond of union, while the Afghan and local rebels were always ready to harass the imperialists all around. In those critical days, help from Delhi was not easily and instantly available. Thus on being left leaderless, all the Mughal detachments first left Gaur and then abandoned Bengal altogether retreating to Bhagalpur enroute to Delhi.

On hearing of Munim Khan's death, Akbar appointed Husain Quli Beg entitled Khan-i-Jahan to be the viceroy of Bengal and sent him off with Raja Todar Mal as his lieutenant in November 1575. The new viceroy, though gained many signal victories, his regime was troubled by serious internal troubles and discord.<sup>1</sup> The rebel Mughal officers, leaving Gaur, arrived at Bhagalpur. The new viceroy also with fresh reinforcements arrived there. The bewilderment of these self-

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 194.

interested men increased. They were not inclined to turn back and co-operate with Khan Jahan. Neither they could venture to proceed to Delhi for fear of the emperor's wrath. Most of them discoursed upon the refractoriness of the Khan Jahan's Bengali people, the pestilential climate of the Viceroyalty province and hence refused to go back to Bengal. Some of the strife-mongering Mughal officers brought forward the issue of religion. They refused to take their orders from a Persian and a Shia. Khan Jahan, Bairam Khan's sister's son, was a Shia while most of the other imperial officers in Bengal were Sunnis. Hence "they began to chatter about the leadership of Khan Jahan".<sup>1</sup> However Todar Mal and Khan Jahan succeeded in turning the officers' mind and they agreed to accompany them. The credit for changing the rebel officers' mind goes to Raja Todar Mal who "with his persuasive tongue, tactful dealing and more potent money gifts, patched up a working truce among them which ensured the reconquest of Bengal".<sup>2</sup> Although Bengal was partially reconquered, Khan Jahan's viceroyalty could do nothing in restoring discipline and unity in the imperial camp in Bengal. The issue of religion still kept the imperial camp divided. When the imperial army was in Rajmahal opposed to Daud Karrani, there could not be pitched battle as the 'Chagtais' did not wish that so great an enterprise should be headed by Khan Jahan who was a Qizilbash. They had not such fidelity as to disregard, on account of their master's work, differences in religion and custom and to endeavour for carrying out his objects. "Necessarily" writes Abul Fazl, "such unrighteous thoughts were obstacle in the patch of the auspiciousness of the faction. Also the Bengal army had their hearts turned against the country on account of the prevalence of plague and their energy was devoted to prevent the persecution of the work".<sup>3</sup>

Upon the news of internal discord in the imperial camp, Akbar sent Rai Purakhotam, Maulana Tayib and Shamsheer Khan to Bihar to manage the province and exert themselves in developing the country, in conciliating the soldiers and in sympathising with the oppressed. But these newly arrived officers by their cupidity gave rise to much confusion. In the matters of reviews and drills and of branding, they exhibited unnecessary harshness and lost sight of prudence.

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 229-231.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 250.



The avaricious Mughal collectors resorted to all sorts of crimes and became hard upon the common soldiery. Those who amassed money through bribes failed to provide horses while those who did spend money for military things, were driven to distraction by having to conciliate and satisfy the cravings of the greedy officials. Both groups got a pretext for discontent and plunged into thoughts of sedition.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the imperial troops and some of the officers in Bihar were involved in a conspiracy against the imperial government. Being apprised of such unhappy situation in the imperial camp, Akbar issued orders to Raja Todar Mal, Rai Lankaram, Naquib Khan and others that they should immediately proceed to Bihar and inflict chastisement on the rebels.

Meanwhile the death of Khan-i-Jahan in December 1578 caused further troubles and defections in the imperial camp in Bengal. The next Mughal Viceroy of Bengal Muzaffar Khan Muzaffar Khan's Turbati (1579-80) fared no better in dealing with Viceroyalty the situation. His habitual wavering, and lack of tact and clear vision aggravated the situation more which led to his tragic failure as an administrator and ultimately his death at the hands of his own mutinous officers. By 1580, the Mughal empire reached a most important stage of evolution. Emperor Akbar realised that the stage of conquest was over and the stage of peaceful and settled administration had reached. With this object in view, he sent along with the new viceroy of Bengal, Muzaffar Khan, a staff of departmental heads—like Diwan, Bakshi, Mid Adl, Sadr and Kotwal. These officials were instructed to institute a regular administration to regularise the revenue system and to introduce discipline in the army. In fact, the emperor desired to put an end to arbitrary personal rule of the viceroy which had been the practice hitherto and to establish official routine in the matter of administration.<sup>2</sup>

But unfortunately these expectations of the emperor were belied due to the utter inefficiency of the viceroy and the laudable reforming zeal of the new officers. Muzaffar Khan could not recognise the measure of greatness and failed to exert himself in managing the province and the army. Due to short sightedness, he regarded the new officers as partners and withdrew his head from business and assumed grand airs. He left the state business to them and withheld himself from conciliating the soldiers and the peasantry.

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 427.

Bengal was a difficult country to be ruled peacefully since the days of the Turko-Afghans. As Abul Fazl writes, "the country of Bengal is a land where owing to the climate's favouring the base, the dust of dissension is always rising. From the wickedness of men families have decayed and dominions been ruined. Hence in old writings it was called a *Bulghakkahana* (house of turbulence)".<sup>1</sup> Muzaffar Khan was haughty and could not conciliate the friends and strangers. The other officials were greedy and busied themselves in gathering presents through violence. Tactless officials began the disturbances by making inquiries into the accumulations of Khan-i-Jahan, the former viceroy. The work of the emperor suffered much from their selfish greeds and disobedience to the viceroy who was not strong enough to check their evil doings. "And now within a few months a storm burst over Bengal and Bihar from the attempt of the newly arrived civil officers to bring the imperial captains there to account and stop their illegal gains."<sup>2</sup> Ismail Quli Khan and other Turkomen rose up in arms. The Bengal official, after the manner of the Bihar officials, vigorously set themselves in demanding gold from all the Turkomen in the country and in using severity towards them. The ring leader of the Bengal rebels Baba Khan frequently expressed his griefs by saying, "upto now I have spent Rupees 70,000 in presents and not one hundred horsemen have had the branding effected and the condition of other fief-holders of this province is still worse".<sup>3</sup> The excessive demands of the officials led to mutiny in the imperial camp. The ring leaders of the Bengal rebellion were Baba Khan and Wazir Jamil. Qiya Khan in Orissa, Murad Khan in Fathabad (Faridpur) and Shah Bardi in Sonargaon spoke about pacification but practically these Mughal officials did nothing in this direction.

Meanwhile the men in Bihar also broke out into open rebellion. The Bengal officers and soldiers bent on rebellion left Tanda in January 1580 and nine days later openly declared their rebellion. These rebels "were secretly backed by the partisans of Akbar's brother Mirza Hakim, the ruler of Kabul whom the malcontents conspired to place on the throne of Delhi as a more orthodox Muslim and a softer tool than the strong and free-thinking Akbar".<sup>4</sup> Dwelling on

Causes of diffection as analysed by Abul Fazl

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 428.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Bengal*, II, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide*, *Akbarnama*, III, p. 428.

<sup>4</sup> *Dacca Univ.*, *History of Bengal*, II, p. 197.

the causes of the defection in the imperial camp, Abul Fazl writes that the easy accumulation of wealth completely corrupted the officials. He further writes that the attempt of the newly arrived imperial officials at muster and branding and the restitution of unauthorised revenue collection provoked the older section of the military officials. According to the imperial chronicler the retirement of right-thinking men who could have by ability suppressed the disturbances encouraged the malcontents to rise up in arms.<sup>1</sup> Muzaffar Khan's arrogance and lack of moderation provoked the imperial officers. His torture on Khaladin Khan, the fief-holder of Jaleswar for money terrified "all lover of money". Muzaffar Khan's attempt to recover the fiefs of Khaladin Khan and Ismail Quli Khan provoked other fief-holders. Stewart remarks with justice that the historians of Akbar's time have endeavoured to throw the blame of the rebellion in Bengal and Bihar on the shoulders of the Mughal viceroy, who, in fact, appears to have merely obeyed the order of the imperial court. The capital punishment inflicted upon Roshan Beg, one of the collectors of the crown lands, also inflamed the trouble which had been brewing. Roshan Beg embezzled the revenue and for fear of punishment fled to Kabul and joined Mirza Hakim there. Shortly he came back to Bengal and began to instigate the imperial officials. The emperor ordered the viceroy to put Roshan Beg to death. Muzaffar Khan could not understand the times and thought that by putting him to death at the beginning of the rebellion, he would be able to induce the strifemongers to submission. But it enhanced their turbulence.<sup>2</sup> Another cause of the trouble was the injudicious increase of the revenue by the Diwan Khwaja Shah Mansur. After the conquest of Bengal and Bihar, the emperor had ordered the increment of the pay of the soldiers by 100 per cent in Bengal and 50 per cent in Bihar with a view to inspire the soldiers to imperial service. The Diwan failing to understand the situation increased the pay of the troops in Bengal by 50 per cent and that of the troops in Bihar by 20 per cent. This provoked the troops of Bengal and Bihar and thus they got another pretext for creating trouble.

The Bengal officers and soldiers left Tanda in January 1580 and nine days later openly declared their rebellion. Muzaffar Khan sent an army against the rebels and the two armies came to face each other across the Ganges at Rajmahal. Meanwhile, the Bihar mutineers,

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<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 431.

alarmed at the news of fresh reinforcements from the imperial court, formed a league with the Bengal mutineers. Due to the negligence of Muzaffar Khan, they easily got possession of the Teliagarhi pass where the Bengal mutineers soon joined the Bihar mutineers. The mutineers proposed a reconciliation which was refused by the loyal commanders. The mutineers expected that some well-intended imperial servants would represent to the emperor their present embarrassment and would seek redress for them.<sup>1</sup>

Actually the emperor forgave them and an order was issued censuring Muzaffar Khan and "making joyful those who had gone astray by the news of forgiveness". According to Iqbal-nama, two orders were issued, one to Muzaffar Khan censuring him and asking him that Qaqshals who were old servants should be confirmed in their jagirs and the other to Barbak and other Qaqshals forgiving them for their past behaviour. In the heat of the contest between the loyal and the rebel soldiers on the bank of the Ganges, the imperial orders arrived. The imperial officers set themselves to reconcile the rebels while the latter held a feast as a mark of their triumph. They demanded that Muzaffar Khan should give an understanding that he would favourably consider their case so that they might return to the service of the emperor. Attempts were made for a reconciliation. But soon dissension sprang up. The Qaqshals apprehended some sort of treachery and hence they left the meeting place and raised disturbance anew. In the words of Abul Fazl, the audacity of the rebels were backed up by the ruler of Kabul whom the rebels afterwards proclaimed emperor of Delhi.<sup>2</sup>

Daily skirmishes on both sides continued for 19 days on the banks of the Ganges. The imperialists suffered disaster due to the imbecile hesitation and inaction of Muzaffar who had "lost the thread of counsel and became foolish from suspiciousness and want of heart. He neither would himself arrange the troops, nor would give permission to engage the officers who were everywhere ready for service."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447.

Muzaffar Khan became more perplexed when a group of imperialists joined the rebels. He at once retired to Tanda. He lost all confidence in his own men and felt it impossible to defend the fort of Tanda. Meanwhile, the miserable plight of Muzaffar Khan encouraged the mutineers. They swarmed into the fort and began to plunder the treasures of the imperial officers lodged there. During the plundering, Muzaffar Khan was kept almost into confinement in his own house and quite a large number of terrified imperialists took refuge with the enemy. On 19 April 1580, Muzaffar Khan was tortured and put to death by the rebels. According to Badauni, Muzaffar Khan was tortured and then appointments and fiefs were distributed among the rebels and the Khutba was read in the name of Muhammad Hakim Mirza. Everyone got something and was satisfied. The distribution of titles was as follows : Masum Khan Kabuli was made Vakil on behalf of the absent Hakim Mirza and the title of Durrani was conferred on him; Baba Qaqshal was styled Khan-Khanan and was appointed viceroy of Bengal and Jabbari Khan was styled Khan Zaman and was appointed to the office of Tuzak Bagi. To everyone there were granted jagirs, a standard and a dram. Some were made commanders and received the title of Khan as well as a flag.<sup>1</sup> Thus Bengal and Bihar were formally cut off from the imperial domain.

The rebels now became practically supreme in the eastern provinces and they thought that they would now "spend their days in pleasure".

**Bihar recovered  
1580**

In Bihar, Bahadur Badakhshi, son of Said Badakhshi, who was the imperial collector at Tirhut, took the advantage of the disturbances in Bihar and usurped the Government of Tirhut. Iqbalnama says that Bahadur assumed independence, had the Khutba read in his name and assumed the title of Bahadur Shah. Masum Khan sent Said Badakhshi to Bahadur to act in collaboration with other rebels. But Bahadur ignored the proposal.<sup>2</sup> During this confusion the report of the coming of fresh imperial reinforcements became current. Masum Kabuli with a large number of the rebels hastened off to Bengal. He left Arab Bahadur and others in Patna to carry on the plunder. Shaham Khan who recently joined the rebels now left their camp and to prove his loyalty to the emperor, he sent an army against Bahadur Badakhshi. But it was defeated. Hence Shaham Khan proceeded

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 449-450.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451.

personally against Bahadur and gained victory. The loyal Muhib Ali Khan of Rohtas defeated Arab Bahadur and recovered Patna. The news of fresh reinforcements from the imperial court disheartened the rebels and desertion and dissension broke out in their rank. While on the other hand the loyal imperial officers and penitent mutineers had been joining the advancing imperial army everyday. The imperialists assembled in the vicinity of Patna and the nobels made vows of concord and harmony. Tarsun Khan and Raja Todar Mal commanded the centre. Muhib Ali Khan, Shaham Khan and others commanded the right wing. Sadiq Khan and others commanded the left wing. Abdul Wahid and others were in the vanguard. The imperial army advancing cautiously reached Monghyr on 19 May 1580. The Bengal rebels advanced from Garhi to offer battle to the imperialists. Todar Mal held a council to deliberate on the plan of action. Some suggested immediate action against the rebels, while some suggested that they should fortify themselves and be on their guard. Meanwhile, some of the imperialists who had lately joined the rebels came to the imperial camp and informed them about the condition of their companions.<sup>1</sup> The imperialists decided to stand on the defensive and fortified their camp by raising walls and digging a moat. On 7 June, the rebels approached the imperial citadel and raised disturbances. The loyalists opened fire. During the skirmish many of the loyalists joined the rebels. Their ring-leaders were Tarkhan Diwana and Humayun Quli. While daily skirmishes continued on both sides, Akbar sent further reinforcements. Meanwhile the condition of the rebels grew worse. They were alarmed at the news of fresh reinforcements. Hence some of them took to flight. The loyal elements were not aware of the miserable plight of the rebels. At length Khwaja Shamsuddin arrived with 1200 horses and represented the confusion in the rank of the rebels. "The miserable plight of the foe became patent to the whole army."<sup>2</sup>

The imperialists at the news of the flight of the rebels, proceeded to Patna. An advanced detachment under Farankhudi was sent by Todar Mal. The rebels after a futile resistance were overwhelmed (25 July 1580). As a result, Monghyr and Patna were easily relieved.

In south Bihar an imperial detachment proceeding from Patna recovered Bihar City, Gaya and Sherghati towards the end of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

September. At this stage, Azam Khan Koka who was sent by the emperor joined the army. "The great rebellion had in the meantime subsided before the two imperial armies effected a junction."<sup>1</sup> Azam Khan succeeded in defeating Dulpat Shah, the son and successor of Gajapati of Jagadishpur. While the imperialists had been advancing quite successfully, jealousy and discord between the two imperial leaders—Azam Khan and Shahbaz Khan—hampered their progress and encouraged the rebels afresh. However, order was soon restored in the imperial camp and the rebels relinquishing the idea of battle hastened off to Bengal. Steps were taken to restore peace and order in Bihar. Upon the arrival of the imperial troops at Ghiyaspur, the news came that Arab Bahadur, one of the ring-leaders of the rebels, was defeated by Shahbaz Khan. But Arab Bahadur arrived at Sarang and began oppressing the people there. At this news, Shahbaz Khan was sent to punish Arab. Ghazi Khan was left with a body of troops in Bihar. Sadiq Khan and others were sent to Monghyr to clear the country of the rebels and to protect the peasantry against the torture of the rebels. Azam Khan, Todar Mal and others proceeded to Patna and Hajipur. The progress of the imperial arms was again disturbed by the pride and arrogance of Shahbaz Khan. The easy victory of Dulpat Shah and Arab Bahadur turned the head of Shahbaz Khan and he set up an almost independent court at Patna. Azam Khan and Todar Mal stayed at Hajipur. Shahbaz Khan began lavishly to distribute fiefs and presents to his followers. As a result many of the imperial officers flocked to the standard of Shahbaz Khan. Azam Khan became disgusted with everything and Todar Mal postponed everything. Thus practically the whole affairs of the province of Bihar devolved upon Shahbaz Khan

Though some of the officers intervened in the matter, the disunity and discord in the imperial camp continued. Time was important to take proper charge of the provinces of Bengal and Bihar. But nothing was done.<sup>2</sup> Azam Khan and Todar Mal left for Tirhut. Though the pretext was to put down Bahadur, in reality they sought to get away from Shahbaz Khan. The latter also went off with a large army to Jaunpur. Though he too was moved by a desire for separation

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 476-77.

from Azam Khan, he gave out that he wished to guide Farankhudi to service. This defection in the imperial camp delayed the task of reconquering Bengal and consolidating the imperial position in Bihar.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Masum Khan Kabuli fled to Bengal and entered into a contest with his ally Sharafuddin Husain and treacherously slew the latter. This gave rise to dissensions in the camp of the rebels in Bengal. The rebels' hope of success grew faint when Shahbaz Khan thoroughly crushed their most ardent leader and ally Farankhudi near Oudh in January 1581. Their hope of success completely evaporated when Akbar's troops marched into Kabul in 1581 and compelled his rival brother Mirza Hakim to flee to the hills.

In April 1582 Khan-i-Azam was appointed viceroy of Bengal.<sup>2</sup> The imperial troops in Bihar and Oudh were ordered to cooperate with the new viceroy. Tarsan Khan, Shaham Khan and others were attached to the army of Khan-i-Azam. Orders were also sent to Sadiq Khan, Muhjib Ali Khan and the troops of Bihar and Oudh to get themselves ready for the war and to join the viceroy's army. News became current that the Bengal rebels had stirred up fresh strife and that Jabhari, Tarkhan Diwana and others had come to Bihar and were oppressing the people there. The Bengal rebels had taken possession of Hajipur and several other parganas from the agents of Khan-i-Azam. Masum Khan Kabuli also became active owing to the assistance of the rebels. Bahadur Kuruh came with an army of Qutlu's Afghans to the neighbourhood of Tanda and Masum Kabuli turned back there to help Bahadur Kuruh. Sadiq Khan bravely defended the fort of Patna and gathered round him the fief-holders of the neighbouring regions. They acted in harmony and drew out their forces. The rebels also got themselves prepared for a battle. An imperial contingent was sent across the Ganges to Hajipur and they raised a fort on the bank of the Gandak. Here 2,000 imperialists were being opposed by 5,000 rebels. At last the imperialists gained a victory. Khabita Khan, a leader of the rebels, was slain. As the rainy season was near at hand, Shah Quli, Sk. Ibrahim and Farid Bokhari who had been sent off on account of the disturbances in Bengal and Bihar were recalled.<sup>3</sup>

By 1581 the Mughal mutineers in Bihar were almost overwhelmed and throughout the year 1582 strenuous efforts were made to reconquer

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 484-85.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 567.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 575.



Bengal. The Mughal fief-holders of Allahabad, Oudh and Bihar assembled their forces near Hajipur and shortly a large army was collected. Khan-i-Azam at the head of a large army advanced towards Teliagarhi in March 1582. Tarsun Khan, Ibrahim and other imperial commanders crossed the river and made efforts to reconquer the lost regions. The imperial armies made a junction near Monghyr. Tarsun Khan and Shah Quli Khan encamped near Kohlgaon. The rebels prepared for a battle in the neighbourhood of Katigang. By this time many of the leaders of the Mughal mutineers disappeared from the scene, but Masum Kabuli was still at the head of the rebels. The latter made pacts with Qutlu Lohani of Orissa and the Qaqshals of North Bengal.

But in the meantime Khan-i-Azam had already recovered Teliagarhi. The rebels at this stage came forward. Both sides stood ready on both banks of the Ganges. "For nearly a month the two armies lay facing each other and discharging guns and muskets only." In fact, the loyalists dared not cross the river in face of the vast numbers of the rebels. However, in the heat of the contest, Qazizada who was one of the ring leaders, came from Faridpur and brought a large number of well-equipped war-boats along with him. On 24 April, Qazizada was killed by a cannon-ball. The death of the rebel admiral led to dissension in the rebel camp and many of the rebel leaders were induced to desert to the loyalists.

It was agreed that they should withdraw from fighting and return to their homes and sometimes after they should come to the camp and rejoin the imperialists. As a result of this desertion, the rebels were thrown into confusion and were compelled to flee. Shortly the Qaqshals rejoined the imperialists. Masum Kabuli tried to wreck vengeance on the deserting Qaqshals by plundering their fief, Ghoraghat. Khan-i-Azam detached Muhib Ali Khan, Ibrahim Khan and others to the rescue of the Qaqshals. Upon their arrival, the rebels fled.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1583 Shahbaz Khan was appointed viceroy of Bengal in the place of Khan-i-Azam. During the transition, Masum Kabuli became once more active and he raided upto 14 miles of Tanda. Shahbaz Khan hurried up from Patna. The imperialists halted on the bank of Jamuna. Shahbaz in a letter to Masum admonished him for his falling away. He gave him counsels mingled with threats and

Shahbaz Khan's  
Viceroyalty  
1583-87

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 594.

encouragements. Parleys between the two sides continued for some days.

At last Masum agreed to render loyal service and an agreement was drawn up and sealed by the heads of the army. It was agreed that on the following day, Masum would tender his apologies for the past.

But some of the strife-mongers managed to change the mind of Masum and he broke his pledge. Hence Shahbaz Khan had to resort to arms and made a violent charge upon the rebels. The latter were thoroughly defeated and Masum took refuge in Isa Khan's country. The viceroy hastened to Sherpur (Bogra) which was the home of many of the rebels. Some of the families of the rebels were captured. About 150 noted rebels were made prisoners.<sup>1</sup>

Shahbaz Khan's inordinate pride alienated his subordinates and the mutual jealousies of the imperial commanders in the eastern provinces prevented unity in their rank. An intense hostility grew up between Shahbaz Khan and Sadiq Khan and, in fact, during Shahbaz Khan's Bhati campaign, Sadiq Khan instead of accompanying the viceroy separated himself from the latter. In the course of the Bhati campaign, the subordinate Mughal officers hampered in various ways the work of Shahbaz.

"The imperial officers" as Abul Fazl writes, "saw their gain in what was their loss and thought that the defeat of Shahbaz Khan would be an advantage to themselves. The first to go off without fighting was Muhib Mikhan. Everyone left his place. Shahbaz awoke from his sleep of haughtiness and made some efforts to win the affections of his officers. But to no avail."<sup>2</sup> In spite of brilliant victory of the imperialists over Isa Khan of Sonargaon, Shahbaz Khan was compelled to march back to Tanda due to the non-cooperation and alienation of the imperial officers. Emperor Akbar's repeated admonitions had no effect. Hence, he at last separated the two charges; Sadiq Khan was ordered to take charge of Bengal and Shahbaz Khan was given Bihar.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1585, upon the failure of Sadiq Khan in suppressing rebellion, the emperor again ordered Shahbaz Khan to assume the charge of Bengal. This time following a policy of conciliation Shahbaz Khan succeeded in winning over a large number of the rebels and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 622.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 659.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 675.

Masum Kabuli came to terms with the viceroy. With the surrender of Masum Kabuli, the fire of rebellion almost subsided.

Disunity in the imperial camp in the eastern provinces, mutual jealousies and faction fighting among the imperial officers and occasional revolts by Mughal officers and soldiers at last convinced Akbar about the urgency of instituting a regularised administration. With a view to prevent recurrence of such unfortunate incidents as well as to introduce discipline in the rank of the officials, Akbar ordered for each province of his empire the same uniform cadre of officials namely, a governor, a deputy governor, a revenue minister, an inspector-general of forces, a civil judge, a criminal judge and a police officer. A royal decree to this effect was issued from the court in November 1586.

But the situation did not improve much to the entire satisfaction of the imperial court. The reign of Jahangir also marked indiscipline and dissension in the imperial camp in Bengal.

During the  
reign of  
Jahangir

Mutual jealousies among the imperial officers hampered to a considerable extent the progress of the imperial arms against the local landlords (the Bhuiyas) of Bengal. The inordinate pride and arrogance of the Mughal viceroy Islam Khan also caused much trouble in the imperial camp during the early years of Jahangir's reign.

Islam Khan's  
Viceroyalty  
1608-1613

The reign of Jahangir witnessed a change in the administrative policy of the imperial court. Jahangir was interested not only in expanding Mughal sway in the eastern provinces but also in maintaining discipline in the rank of the imperial officers and soldiers with a view to strengthen the imperial administration. Islam Khan, upon his arrival in the province, sent a report about the real state of affairs of Bengal to the following effect: "The management of the affairs of this province should receive the attention of the officers of the state. All the old officers who proved to be dishonest and treacherous and who are unfit for service in the province should be recalled to the court."<sup>1</sup> This report bears testimony to the fact that dishonesty and treacherous disposition among the imperial officers posted in the province was still rampant even in the early years of Jahangir's reign. The emperor, accordingly, issued a farman to the following effect: "Wazir Khan, the former Diwan of the province, the sons of Masum Khan and Lachi Khan Qaqshak

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, pp. 3-4.

who were the leaders of the mischief in that country are to be taken into custody and sent to the imperial court. Any one of these old officers who takes recourse to his old habits and courses of action against your orders and advice, should be discharged from service. Whoever is wanted by you from the court, we shall appoint him in that place.”<sup>1</sup> The anxiety and determination of the emperor in restoring discipline and peaceful administration is thus evident in this farman. On the basis of this farman, Islam Khan sent away all the incompetent and dishonest officers. The Afghan chiefs of doubtful loyalty, such as the sons of Masum Khan Kabuli and Lachi Khan Qaqshal (the Qaqshals of Ghoraghat were noted for their disaffection and disloyalty since the time of Akbar) were captured and sent away to the imperial court. Efforts were also made to recover the guns and artillery from the hands of the disloyal imperial officers and run-away soldiers. Although Islam Khan maintained strict control over the imperial officers, and the emperor gave him a free-hand in regard to the management of the province, cases of dissension and rebellion in the imperial camp were not altogether absent.

The first serious insurrection that broke out in the imperial camp was that of Ali Akbar. The latter was an officer of Wazir Khan.

After the dismissal of Wazir Khan, Ali Akbar managed to secure a mansab in Bengal and came to the city of Malda to wait on Islam Khan who was on his way to eastern Bengal. While proceeding to Malda, Ali Akbar, on the way, extorted a large sum of money from a eunuch of Khwaja Baqir Ansari. Proceeding further, he came to Dihik where he met Mir Jalil who was carrying imperial treasures to Dacca. He thought within himself : “At this time Islam Khan had absolute control over the imperial officers and he has imprisoned a man like Baz Bahadur ; on my arrival, the Khwaja (Baqir Ansari) will certainly lodge a complaint against me. Islam Khan will not only compel me to return this money but he will stop the allowance of my jagir as well. There is no way out of it and I have already spent that money. So, it is the best opportunity to loot Mir Jalil also. . . I shall seize the property in possession of the aforesaid Mir and raise an insurrection in this region.”<sup>2</sup> Acting on these calculations, Ali Akbar rushed upon Mir Jalil who failed to withstand the attack and hence ran away. Two elephants and the entire treasury fell into the hands of Ali Akbar.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 92.

From there he proceeded to Sahaspir where Shaikh Jamal, brother of Mughal commander Ghiyas Khan, opposed Ali Akbar. Jamal was overpowered and his elephants also fell into Ali Akbar's hands. The latter returned to Malda. His arrival there caused much panic among the people and they became busy in hiding their valuables and properties. Mahmud Beg, the Kotwal of the city, offered resistance to Ali Akbar. The latter made a violent charge upon Mahmud Beg and it created a great panic among the soldiers of Mahmud Beg. The rebels then plundered the city and the market and then proceeded to Purnea. Here too Ali Akbar plundered the goods and chattels of the citizens of the city. Very soon a Mughal detachment under Iftikar Khan marched against Ali Akbar and after a severe engagement, the latter was slain whereupon a great dissension occurred among the rebels and they fled. Iftikar Khan sent a report of the victory to Islam Khan who heaved a sigh of relief.<sup>1</sup>

There was another serious defection in the imperial camp in Bengal when Qasim Khan, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal (brother of Islam Khan) was ordered by the imperial court to hand over the charge of the province to the new viceroy Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang. Qasim Khan, who was autocratic in instinct, violent in temper and extremely arrogant, instead of obeying the command of the imperial court quietly, tried to create troubles. Qasim Khan's attitude made war with the new viceroy almost imminent. When Qasim Khan started from Dacca and sent the elephants by land route and Ibrahim Khan reached near Jatrapur (at the confluence of the Ganges, Dhaleswari and Ichhamati, being the usual route from Dacca to Rajmahal), Qasim Khan hastily arrived at Jatrapur, made a halt there and began to raise a fort and to prepare for a battle. Indeed the arrogant attitude of Qasim Khan gave a serious jolt to unity in the imperial camp. A large number of imperialists, particularly the adherents of Qasim Khan, joined the latter in the hope of retaining their posts and ill-gotten gains. Through correspondence with Ibrahim Khan, Qasim Khan came to feel that the former was ready for a battle. Hence Qasim Khan carried with him the elephant-stable and a large number of landlords with full equipments of war. At this turn of events, Ibrahim Khan had no other alternative than to resort to arms. Therefore, Ibrahim Khan also pitched his camp on the other bank of the river facing the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

fort of Qasim Khan. Ibrahim Khan sent Murawat Khan to Qasim Khan as a mediator and to ask the latter to surrender the elephants, the fleet, the artillery and the landlords. Ibrahim Khan's envoy warned Qasim Khan thus: "If they are not willingly given, we will not allow you to proceed till you give an account of your four years' subhadarship of Bengal."<sup>1</sup>

Qasim Khan being enraged, attempted to imprison Murawat Khan. But the latter however managed to escape and he insisted on immediate action before Qasim Khan's fleet could join his army. Accordingly, Ibrahim Khan busied himself in arranging his troops. He distributed the entrenchments to the Khans and ordered them to besiege the fort of Qasim Khan. He posted his picked soldiers on one side so that they might move in advance of the rest of the army. He placed five thousand cavalry of the 'mansabdars' as well as his own selected officers along with four thousand infantry under the command of Chand Bahadur. He instructed them to oppose the army of Qasim Khan under Bahadur Khan and Musa Khan on the bank of the river Jamuna. These preparations caused panic in the camp of Qasim Khan and his associates made Qasim Khan agree to surrender the landlords along with the fleet and the artillery. Accordingly, Qasim Khan handed over the landlords along with the fleet and artillery to Ibrahim Khan except those garrisoned in his fort.<sup>2</sup> But that could not help in preventing an armed conflict between the two sides. On the arrival of Chand Bahadur on the bank of the river Jamuna, Bahadur Khan and Musa Khan marched forward and made a violent charge upon the imperialists on the bank of the river. Bahadur Khan and Musa Khan gave a good account of them but the heavy cannonading from the opposite side caused a great consternation among their followers and they became scattered on all sides. Bahadur Khan was slain and Musa Khan was wounded and captured. The elephants, the horses, and the entire land-equipage of Qasim Khan fell into the hands of Chand Bahadur and the soldiers of Ibrahim Khan.

Meanwhile the siege continued and supply of provisions and food to the fort of Qasim Khan was almost blocked. He was closely besieged from all sides. "On account of the scarcity of corn" writes Mirza Nathan, "as well as through the firing of the artillery, the garrison was put to such straits that the people of the fort began to shout in thirst and cry for safety."<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Khan ordered the

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 496.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 437-38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

imperial officers to occupy the fort. The latter said : "Qasim Khan has taken the oath of committing Jawhar and as soon as the fort is broken into, will kill all his people. God forbid, if such a thing happens, who is going to answer the imperial investigations ?" Ibrahim Khan assured them that he would answer the charges of an enquiry. Upon this assurance, the imperial soldiers moved out of their trenches and made an assault on the fort of Qasim Khan. It gave rise to a great tumult in the fort of Qasim Khan. The latter killed all his wives with his own hand and ordered his brothers and relations to kill the rest. A good many of Qasim Khan's soldiers and officers joined the loyalists. "The unnecessary battle and quarrel ended in this way."<sup>1</sup> After the conclusion of this affair, Ibrahim Khan proceeded to Dacca and Qasim Khan, having destroyed his family and treasures, left for the imperial court in disgrace.

During the viceroyalty of Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang, unity in the imperial camp in Bengal got another serious jolt when Prince Shah

Jahan revolted against his father and occupied Bengal for some time. Towards the end of 1622 prince Shah Jahan rebelled in the Daccan against his father because his hopes of a peaceful succession to the Mughal throne were frustrated by the machinations of his step-mother Nur Jahan who was bent upon crowning her fourth son Sahariar. The rebel prince marched from Burhanpur and reached the vicinity of Delhi wherefrom he put forward a series of demands to the emperor. The emperor previously displeased at his son's conduct, became very much enraged at these insolent proposals. Hence the emperor issued an edict proclaiming his son a rebel and confiscating all his estates and property. He further issued orders upon his loyal subjects to join the imperial army and to assist him in defending the throne.<sup>2</sup> The rebel prince at first made an attempt to take Agra by force. But he suffered a great reverse and was forced to flee to the Deccan. An imperial army under prince Parvez and Mahabat Khan gave a hot chase to the rebel prince. Unable to maintain his position in the Deccan, Shah Jahan looked for a quiet place at a safe distance from the imperial capital. Soon Bengal attracted his attention "which on account of its peculiar physical features, geographical isolation, rich mineral resources, coupled with its chronic political confusion, had afforded a temporary field to many a daring adventurer and an

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, p. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 252.

asylum to many a political refugee".<sup>1</sup> Both internal and external situation of Bengal seemed to be favourable to the interest of the rebel prince. In spite of Ibrahim Khan's generous treatment, some of the subdued 'bhuiyas' of Bengal like Musa Khan and others were looking forward to an opportunity to free themselves from the shackles of vassalage. The revolt of the prince and his adventures in Bengal naturally encouraged those 'bhuiyas' to desert the imperial cause and to join the rebel prince. Following the example of Musa Khan and others, some zamindars of Bengal like Bir Bhan of Chandrakona and Bahadur Khan of Hijli revolted against the imperial authority creating thereby a very difficult situation for the loyalists in Bengal.

The external situation likewise seemed to be favourable to the rebel prince. The Mughal Government in Bengal was at constant hostility with the Arrakanese at this time. Hence the rebel prince expected to make a common cause with the Arrakanese against the imperial power. Moreover the Portuguese sailors and officers at Hughly might be persuaded to join the rebel prince in consideration for trading facilities and their war-boats might be utilised. Hence the prince decided to march upon Bengal with a view to replenish his resources as well as to secure troops, allies and base of operations against the imperial power. In October 1623 he left Burhanpur and proceeding north-eastern direction entered the Mughal province of Orissa. Emperor Jahangir instructed Prince Parvez and Muhabat Khan to follow the rebel prince and also sent farmans to Mirza Ahmad Beg and Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang to be on alert and to resist the entry of the rebel prince in Orissa and Bengal respectively. The farmans put Ibrahim Khan and Ahmad Beg Khan in an embarrassing situation. It was really difficult for an imperial officer to take any part in the conflict between an imperial father and a rebel son who was his heir-apparent. The governor of Orissa, Ahmad Beg was quite unprepared when Shah Jahan marched into that province. He made no efforts to oppose the rebel prince and himself with his family left Orissa to the quiet possession of the prince. "Owing to his singular cowardice and incompetence, Orissa passed into the hands of Shah Jahan without a blow." Shah Jahan, after refreshing his army at Cuttack and receiving the homage of Raja Purushottam Dev and smaller landlords, appointed Quli Khan as the governor of the province. From Orissa,

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 306.



he advanced towards Burdwan. It was at Burdwan that the rebel prince for the first time since he left Burhanpur faced resistance. The faujdar of Burdwan, Mirza Salih rejecting the offer of joining the prince, strengthened the defences of the city and prepared for a gallant resistance. Shah Jahan made fresh recruits, impressed into his service a number of Afghan chiefs and assured the Mughal officers of every favour and consideration. These allurements prevailed upon some of the imperial officers and they joined the rebel prince. The desertions is the Mughal camp weakened the position of Mirza Salih and hence he was finally compelled to surrender the city of Burdwan. After making necessary arrangements for the administration of Burdwan, the rebel prince marched towards Rajmahal. So long the Bengal viceroy Ibrahim Khan took no effective and organised measures to check the onward march of the prince. Now, the news of the prince's march towards Rajmahal roused Ibrahim Khan to action. He first made arrangements for strengthening the defence on the south-eastern border against the surprise attack of the Maghs and Portuguese free-booters. The capital was similarly fortified and Khwaja Idrak was posted in-charge of the capital with a force of 500-cavalry and 1,000 musketeers. With the rest of the army and a fleet of 300 war-boats under the admiral Mir Shams, the viceroy marched towards Rajmahal and entrenched himself at a place called Akbarpur. Another imperial contingent encamped at a place further down the Ganges under Mirza Yusuf. The fleet remained midway for co-operation with both the divisions of the imperial army.

Meanwhile Shah Jahan took possession of the old fort of Rajmahal. He then tried to prevail upon Ibrahim Khan to join his rank. He wrote the viceroy a letter, replete with compliments for fidelity and attachment to the emperor and some excuses for his own conduct, to which he said "he was doubtless impelled by fate, that he considered the province of Bengal as beneath his notices, but that, as it lay in his route, he was obliged to pass through it, which he hoped to do with opposition—that if Ibrahim Khan was partial to Bengal, he might make choice of any district in it he preferred, and retire there with his wealth and family, where he should be permitted to continue in the enjoyment of everything he desired; but if he preferred returning to Delhi, he was at liberty to depart, taking with him all his family and

property, for which safe conduct should be granted.”<sup>1</sup> The Bengal viceroy gave a prompt and dignified reply thus, “his majesty had entrusted to him the care of that country and the protection of its inhabitants; that he was grown old in the imperial service and in all probability had not many years longer to live; that he was willing to sacrifice those years to the performance of his duty . . . that as long as he retained a spark of life, Bengal should acknowledge no master but his sovereign.”<sup>2</sup>

The attempt to win over the Bengal governor having failed, the rebel prince prepared for war. Fully convinced that in his situation, inaction was dangerous and that his success depended wholly upon the prompt and vigorous measures, he arranged for a simultaneous assault on the two imperial posts. He despatched Darab Khan with a large force and a train of artillery to storm the new fort of Akbarpur, while Dariya Khan and other Afghan chiefs were sent to cross the Ganges and to attack the viceroy’s camp on the other side of the river. Ibrahim Khan, having taken the precaution of securing all the boats he could collect on his side of the river, the army of the rebel prince was prevented from crossing the Ganges for some time. But ultimately, all attempts of Ibrahim Khan failed and Dariya Khan crossed the Ganges and advanced towards the imperial entrenchments. But Darab Khan found it extremely difficult to storm the fort of Akbarpur. Having failed to do so, he laid siege to the fort. But there continued heavy firing from the besieged fort which hampered the progress of Darab Khan. At this situation Shah Jahan detached his chief commander Abdullah Khan at the head of 1,500 cavalry with Raja Bhim across the Ganges to reinforce Dariya Khan and to make a combined assault on the Bengal viceroy. Ibrahim Khan, on the other hand, ordered the imperial admiral Mir Shams and the Portuguese captain Manoel Tavares to oppose Abdullah Khan and Raja Bhim. But these persons were already in secret league with the rebel prince and made only a gesture of fight. As a result, Abdullah Khan had no difficulty in crossing the river and the rebel force approached the fort of Ibrahim Khan. The number of forces on each side was nearly equal, but the troops of Shah Jahan were better mounted. The governor entrusted the command of the first line to his nephew Ahmad Beg who made a vigorous assault on the rebel force. But Ahmad Beg

The War

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

being repulsed, Ibrahim Khan advanced with the second line. For a time, the battle was well contested mainly because of the personal bravery and steadfastness displayed by Ibrahim Khan. Though requested by his friends not to risk his person in the heat of the engagement, he replied, "my life is of no consequence, I will devote it to the service of his majesty and either conquer or die". Having said this the governor rushed into the thickest of the enemy. But gradually his soldiers deserted him and ultimately he was slain unrecognised, on 20 April 1624. The death of the governor decided the fate of Bengal, and "the authority of the prince was everywhere acknowledged and the Zaminders and public officers hastened to make their terms with the conqueror."<sup>1</sup> Thus Bengal was lost to the empire.

From Akbarnagar, Shah Jahan hastened in quick marches to Dacca in order to secure the immense treasures and war-materials deposited there and to make necessary arrangements for the administration of the province. Raja Bhim was left at Akbarnagar to keep watch over the movements of the imperialists on the western border of Bengal. Farmans were issued calling upon the imperial officers, soldiers and faujdars of Bengal, Bihar and Kamrup to offer their allegiance to the prince. In May 1624, Shah Jahan made a triumphant entry into Dacca. Upon his arrival there, the gates of the fort were thrown open and Ahmad Beg, the nephew of the late governor Ibrahim Khan, waited on the prince and delivered to him all the elephants, horses and other property of his uncle, also 4,000,000 rupees in cash belonging to the state treasury. The prince received the zamindars and public officers and confirmed them to their respective posts and position. A drastic change was made in the personnel of the government. Darab Khan was appointed governor of Bengal; Khwaja Mulki (who had recently joined the rebel prince) was appointed Diwan, Mirza Hidayatallah was made Paymaster and Malick Husain the treasurer. Mirza Nathan, who distinguished himself on many occasions as a devoted imperial servant, had subsequently joined the rebel prince. He was transferred from Kamrup to Akbarnagar as its faujdar. The zamindars of Bengal not only made allegiance to the rebel prince but also placed their war-materials at his disposal. In fact, the whole subah practically speaking threw off the yoke of Mughal emperor.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

The rebel prince's hands were further strengthened by the arrival of a mission from the Arrakan King Thiri Thudhamma who was pursuing his father's (Meng Khanaung) hostile policy to the Mughal emperor. Shah Jahan warmly welcomed the mission and fully reciprocated the friendly gesture of the Arrakan king. It was the common hostility to the emperor that bound them together.

The rebel prince was now the master of Orissa and Bengal. He next occupied Bihar and proceeded westward occupying Jaunpur, Benares, Chunar, Allahabad and Oudh in rapid succession. Hitherto fortune had favoured the imperialists and audacious schemes of Shah Jahan. He was puffed up with easy success and on his route towards Delhi, assumed all the state and authority of the sovereign.

But soon the final trial came when he was opposed by the imperialists under prince Parvez and Muhabat Khan on the bank of the river Tons (U.P.) towards the end of October 1624. While the prince was engaged with the imperialists, his governor in Bengal Darab Khan turned faithless and in spite of repeated summons he did not leave Dacca. Taking the advantages of the rebel prince's pre-occupations, the Arrakan king broke his pledge of friendship with him and began to plunder the coastal region of Bengal on a large scale. The Bengal zamindars also changed their mind and deserted the camp of the rebel Prince. Darab Khan also deserted the prince and thus the cause of Shah Jahan in Bengal was wholly lost.<sup>1</sup> Shah Jahan failing to make his stand any more against the imperialists retreated to Akbarnagar in January 1625 wherefrom he made the final departure for the Deccan. About Shah Jahan's rebellion in Bengal, Stewart has rightly observed, "were we to judge of Shah Jahan's conduct by the rules of Christian morality or by European policy, we should condemn it as unprincipled and unnatural; if we but refer to the events which took place on his accession to the empire. It will be manifest that had his elder brother Purvez lived, Shah Jahan would have had no alternative but the throne or grave : if, therefore, he could have secured to himself even during his father's lifetime, the kingdom of Bengal, he would have been held excused. . . and had he limited his ambition to that object, as he was a favourite of his father, there is little doubt but he might have gained the emperor's consent to the measure. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op. cit.*, pp. 262-63.

During the viceroyalty of Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang, there occurred another serious rebellion in Kamrup. An imperial officer Shaikh Ibrahim Krori posted in Kamrup rose up in rebellion. He had misappropriated a large amount of imperial revenue. Being afraid of severe punishment for his misdemeanour, the Shaikh rebelled and then in order to strengthen himself, entered into a plot with the Ahom King. The latter was to help the former in securing the sovereignty of Kamrup for himself and the Shaikh in return was to join the Ahom King in his war with the imperialists. The Ahom King asked the Shaikh to begin hostilities forthwith and if it was done, he was assured of help in men, money and war-materials, "besides a feudatory rulership and an Ahom princess". Accordingly, Shaikh Ibrahim secretly exhorted Sanatan Koch to attack the Mughal outpost of Dhamdhama and capture the entire garrison there. The imperial thanadar repulsed a night-attack and sought help from Hajo. Shaikh Ibrahim then instigated some mal-contents to intercept the timely arrival of the reinforcement. But Mirza Nathan, however, frustrated the attempt. Orders soon arrived from the imperial court to capture Shaikh Ibrahim alive. Hence, three attempts were made by Mirza Nathan to get hold of the rebel Shaikh, but all failed. The two sides now got ready for an open encounter. Shaikh Ibrahim raised two forts on the bank of the river Barlia and was determined to arrest the passage of the imperialists across it. The revolt having assumed a dangerous proportion, Mirza Nathan requisitioned the help of the thanadar of Pandu. In the face of a stiff opposition, the imperialists crossed the river and occupied the two forts of the Shaikh who was at last wounded and killed. The defeat and death of the Shaikh frustrated the grand plan of the Ahom King to subvert Mughal domination in Kamrup. However, the prolonged rebellion of Shaikh Ibrahim hit the Mughals hard in one way. It seriously weakened Mughal authority in Kamrup. Taking advantage of the situation, Balinarayan again appeared on the scene and continued creating serious troubles for the Mughals.

During the eighty years that covered the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, Bengal enjoyed unusually long peace within its borders and stability of the Mughal rule in the province.

**Conclusion** There never occurred any serious challenge to the unity and solidarity of the imperial camp within Bengal. The causes of rebellions and revolts in the imperial camp from the time of Akbar's accession till the rebellion of prince Shah

Jahan in 1622 and the subsequent tranquility and order are not far to seek. Since the beginning of Akbar's Bengal campaigns till the suppression of the so-called 'Twelve Bhuiyas' by 1613, the province was not prepared to accept any settled and peaceful government. Although the imperial governors and other officers were appointed by the emperor, they were allowed individual initiative and exertions without much interferences from the imperial court. There was no fixed code of conduct for the officials. Hence they often behaved quite in disregard to the orders and wishes of their superior officers. In the midst of constant warfare and disturbances, when there was no organised and effective administration, the officers and lesser commanders acted independently in the interior parts of the provinces. Situated as they were, it was natural that they turned arrogant and on flimsy pretext created disturbances. The easy means of acquiring wealth by plunder as well as by extortions made the imperial officers extremely greedy and whenever there was any attempt to put a stop to their ill-gotten gains, they revolted. In fact, their conduct exactly resembled that of Napoleon's marshals in Spain. The imperial cause suffered greatly due to their selfish greed and disobedience to the provincial governor. The governors were also sometimes responsible for unrest in the imperial camp. The governor Muzaffar Khan's personal incompetence and arrogance led to the sad tale of his viceroyalty which ended in his murder at the hands of his own mutinous officers.

Shahbaz Khan's lack of foresight and inordinate pride alienated his subordinates while they were engaged in a severe contest with Isa Khan of Bhati. This led to mutiny of the imperial officers which was responsible for the disaster of the Bhati campaign of 1584. Due to minimum interference from the imperial court throughout Akbar's reign and the early part of Jahangir's reign, the imperial officers and generals often vied with one another in regard to power and privileges. The viceroyalty of Islam Khan (1608-13) and Qasim Khan (1614-17) may be cited as an illustration. Undue assumption of royal prerogatives by Islam Khan provoked not only the imperial officers in Bengal but also invited imperial displeasure and strong censure. As a result, Jahangir issued an ordinance containing seventeen points "to be observed strictly by the subahdars without the slightest deviation from them".<sup>1</sup> Islam Khan's brother Qasim Khan was equally responsible for indiscipline and unrest in the imperial camp. "Perhaps

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan, I*, p. 213.

the most fatal defect of his character was his quarrelsome spirit, as a result of which he lost the sympathy, advice and cooperation of all the experienced officers in Bengal. . . . Internal disputes and revolts engrossed the governor's attention. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Besides, the easy asylum offered by the numerous landlords in Bengal often encouraged dissension and desertions in the imperial camp.

This is really a peculiar feature of the history of medieval Bengal, the parallel of which is not found in the rest of India. Hence, absence of fixed regulations defining categorically the duties and responsibilities of the civil and military personnel, arrogance and autocratic instincts of the governors in general, prospect of easy wealth, prospect of easy asylum in the domains of local landlords, the peculiar physical conditions of the province and the like caused occasional revolt and rebellions in the Mughal camp in Bengal almost to the end of Jahangir's reign.

On the other hand, under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, there was peace and discipline in the Mughal camp in Bengal. This was mainly due to the fact that during this period, there were three very long viceroyalties in the place of the average short time of three years enjoyed by the previous governors in Bengal. These three viceroyalties were entrusted to Prince Muhammad Shuja (1639-1659), Shaista Khan (1664-1688) and Prince Azim-us-Shan (1698-1707). They all belonged to the imperial family and they evinced much zeal in preserving the interests of the court. As they were kinsmen of the emperor, their position was more stronger than that of the ordinary servants of the imperial court who had governed the province before them. It was therefore very natural that as backed by the sovereign they could enforce obedience in the imperial camp in the province and their "rivals felt their intrigues at the imperial court against these Bengal Viceroys futile". Moreover, during this period the Mughal administration in Bengal got a firm footing and the principle of checks and balances was well established.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAIN FEATURES OF THE HISTORY OF BENGAL UNDER SHAH JAHAN AND AURANGZEB (1628-1707)

The period between 1628 and 1707 was one of peace and consolidation within the frontiers of Bengal Subah and political expansion of Mughal empire on the north-eastern and south-eastern frontiers. It was with the beginning of Shah Jahan's reign that Bengal really settled down to enjoy a peaceful and a regularised civil government. The ground was, of course, prepared in the reign of Jahangir when the local offensive of the landlords popularly known as 'Bhuiyas' was thoroughly crushed by the strong arms of Islam Khan. Another viceroy of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang, during Jahangir's reign, succeeded ably in pacifying rebellion in Kuch Bihar and Kamrup and thereby restoring peace in the frontier vassal kingdom of the Mughal empire. It was, again, during the viceroyalty of Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang that agriculture and commerce began to flourish and the manufactures of the province were carried to a degree of perfection they never attained before. There was an alround prospect of peace, stability and prosperity in Bengal. But those happy trends were suddenly disturbed by the rebellion of Shah Jahan and Bengal once more became a scene of bitter and fierce warfare. The suppressed unruly elements once more raised their heads and thereby clouded the political scene of the province. However with the departure of the rebel prince from the province peace and stability came back there. Since then for more than half a century no internal rebellion could disturb the peace in the province. It was only after restoring peace and consolidating political power in Bengal, that the Mughals entered upon frontier expansion with fresh vigour and strength which bore fruits.

This internal peace and stability was mainly due to the fact that during this long period, the province was ruled by the kinsmen of the emperor. They were Prince Muhammad Shuja (1639-1659), Shaista Khan (1664-1688) and Prince Muhammad Azim (Azim-us-Shan—1698-1707). Being members of the royal family, they were in a more stronger position than those of the other representatives of the emperor who governed the province before them. Naturally they succeeded

Rule of the  
Princes



in enforcing obedience and discipline in the imperial camp and securing loyalty of the governed. Mutual jealousies and mutual heart-burnings amongst the imperial officers and generals which caused so much harm to imperial interests now almost disappeared and all came to obey the imperial viceroys who were kinsmen of the emperor.

With the restoration of peace and order, the Mughal administration in the province began to take definite shape and stability. A large number of officials with powers and responsibility clearly defined were appointed. Bengal was completely included in the Pax-Mughalia. Bengal became a replica of the imperial rule in all its aspects.

Mughal administration firmly established

As a result the hold of the emperor on the administrative set-up of the province became firm. So long the Bengal governors used to send to the court occasional presents in the form of goods and elephants. The viceroys of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb were made to remit the surplus revenue of the province regularly after defraying the cost of the administration. Of course, Jahangir fixed rupees five lakhs for himself and an equal amount for the Queen-consort Nurjahan annually as tributes from Bengal. But the remittance of the tribute from Bengal was not regular. From the time of Shah Jahan and with the appointment of a high-powered 'diwan' independent of the subahdar, the remittance of Bengal revenue and tributes from the frontier vassal princes like Kuch Bihar and Tippera became regular. The remittance of revenue and personal presents of the viceroys to the emperor is another evidence of the emperor's absolute hold on the provincial administration. Through the appointments of high-graded and responsible officers like the 'diwan', the 'bakshi', the 'Waqa-navis', the provincial 'qazi', the centre's hold on the provincial administration was well established. In fact, the centralisation of the provincial administration was one of the principal characteristics of the history of Bengal under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

Of course, it would be wrong to suppose that during the eighty years that covered the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the Bengal administration went smoothly or that there was no breakdown in the administration in the province. Occasional breakdown in administration

There was a virtual breakdown in the internal administration of Bengal when the civil war among the sons of Shah Jahan broke out during the lifetime of the latter. The Bengal viceroy Prince Shuja himself lived in Rajmahal on the frontier close to Bihar while his deputy governed eastern Bengal from Dacca.

Between 1658 and 1659, Shuja twice left the province to contest his father's throne. As a result of his active participation in the struggle for the throne, Bengal's administration broke down and anarchy ensued. The last two and half years of Shuja's viceroyalty were spent in Bihar when he concentrated all his energies and state resources on the struggle with Aurangzeb. Consequently, the government of Bengal was not only starved of men but also of finances. For some time Bengal broke away from the control of Delhi. An acute anarchy gripped the province when Mir Jumla under Aurangzeb's order gave a hot chase to Shuja in Bengal. At this juncture when the two rival imperial armies were fighting with each other, the subordinate imperial officers in the principal towns and villages were pursuing their own interests and oppressing the peasants and the European traders indiscriminately. The result was economic disaster along with administrative debacle.

The next Mughal viceroy of Bengal Mir Jumla could do little in restoring order in the administration. He held the viceroyalty of Bengal for nearly three years (1660-1663). But he was present in the province for barely a year and a half. For the rest of his time he was absent on campaigns in Kuch Bihar and Assam. He made some efforts in reorganising the revenue administration, but they could not produce expected results. Mir Jumla could not deal effectively with certain administrative problems of Bengal which required immediate solution. The rebuilding of the 'nawara' (the fleet) was most urgently required. It was fully depleted by Shuja's negligent administration. But before Mir Jumla could undertake the task of rebuilding it, he had to set out on his fatal Assam campaign. In course of the war with the Ahoms, many naval officers and numerous mariners died and the fleet was completely destroyed. In lower Bengal, the fleet was the only means of offense as well as defence. Hence its destruction led to an aggravation of the plundering raids of the Maghs and Feringi pirates. The administration of the province in the period immediately after the death of Mir Jumla "resembled the reign of mice in a neglected barn". In the period between the death of Mir Jumla and the arrival of Shaista Khan, Bengal was ruled by subordinates without a supreme master on the spot which led to disorder and misrule. All the experienced and able officers of the former regimes had either perished in the Assam campaign of Mir Jumla or had left the province. The gifted Shia officers whom prince Shuja had raised to exalted position were all dismissed by Aurangzeb. Shihabuddin Talish, who had

accompanied Mir Jumla in the Assam campaign has left a graphic picture of the political disorder and administrative lapses thus : "The temporary rulers, in the absence of a substantive viceroy, made the most of their brief day of borrowed power by freely indulging in those wicked desires which they had so long kept in check in fear of Mir Jumla. Every one asked for everything that he fancied and the officials granted it with the utmost liberality like issuing an order on a river to supply water to a petitioner. This they considered a cheap way of gaining fame. Those men including the author who did not supplicate these upstart officials, got nothing. They restored zamindars to their estates, of which they had been deprived. Some zamindars who had clung to their old homes by promising to pay double their normal revenue, now got their old assessment restored . . . In truth, a strange confusion overtook public affairs."<sup>1</sup> Shaista Khan, the next viceroy, had to face on his arrival such a sorry state of affairs. To the credit of Shaista Khan it must be admitted that he succeeded not only in removing political and administrative anomalies but also in reviving the Mughal fleet which helped him in conquering Chittagong in 1666. Hence there was breakdown in the administration from time to time although the general structure and the spirit of the subah system of government remained unaltered.

Another characteristic feature of the history of Bengal under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb was the development of private trade of the Mughal viceroys and their underlings. This 'Sauda-i-khas' evil practice started from the time of prince Shuja, pursued with great zeal by Mir Jumla, Shaista Khan and Azim-us-Sham and only ended by the efforts of Murshid Quli Khan. They called it "Sauda-i-Khas" or the personal trade of His Excellency. The viceroys practised a monopoly of trade in the necessities of life and in some valuable articles of import. They and their underlings engrossed the merchandise at their places of origin or at the ports of unloading and forcing them on the retail dealers at hightened prices. The official monopoly greatly injured the retail trade in articles of daily use. Besides, custom duties and tolls at the places of sale inflicted a double burden on the consumers. Even the European traders and importers who made significant contribution to the industry and wealth of the province suffered harassment indiscriminately by the officials and the underlings of the viceroys at every ferry or toll-

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 372.

post. Foreign articles imported by the European traders were seized by the over zealous underlings of the viceroys, they were bought wholesale at a low price and they were sold to the retail dealers at fancy prices. Shaista Khan practised a monopoly of the sale of salt, betelnut and some other prime necessities of life. As Streynsham Master writes in his Diary, "salt and bees' wax were imperial monopolies in Bengal as early as 1676". In fact, the private trade as practised by the Mughal governors not only ruined the trade of the local merchants but also contributed to the decline of European trade and commerce. Moreover, this private trade deprived the state exchequer of its legal dues in the form of customs and toll. This practice assumed such a dangerous proportion that Aurangzeb had to admonish his grandson Azim-us-Shan, the Bengal viceroy, thus, "... it is not well to oppress the people who have been entrusted to us by the Creator. . . whence have you learnt this 'Sauda-i-khas', which is only another name for pure insanity? Not certainly from your grandfather nor from your father. Better turn your thoughts away from it."<sup>1</sup> Aurangzeb thus ultimately stopped this long practiced evil.

Another characteristic feature of the eighty years of Bengal history was the expansion of the imperial arms in the north-eastern frontier.

In the process of rounding off the territories of Bengal, the Mughals came into direct and immediate contact with two powerful frontier kingdoms—the Ahom Kingdom on the north-east and the kingdom of Arrakan on the south-east. Of the two other frontier kingdoms on the north-east, Kuch Bihar had already been turned into a vassal state and Kamrup conquered and annexed to the Mughal empire in the early years of Jahangir's reign. A severe and prolonged warfare with the two remaining frontier kingdoms ensued in the early years of Aurangzeb's reign. The Mughal campaigns in Assam ended in disaster, but the Mughals achieved a brilliant success against the kingdom of Arrakan with the conquest of Chittagong in 1666.

The reign of Shah Jahan witnessed the fall of the Portuguese power and their ultimate expulsion from the province just after a century of their various activities and commercial supremacy in the field of over-sea trade in Bengal. It was for the first time in the history of Bengal since the accession of Akbar that the Mughal government came into clash with a European power in Bengal.

Fall of the  
Portuguese  
power

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 403.

The reign of Aurangzeb witnessed the gradual rise in the volume of English import and export trade in Bengal and their first open clash with the imperial government. Since 1660 the English trade with Bengal began to improve rapidly. But by 1686 the English trade was brought almost to a standstill by the lawlessness and greed of the Mughal officials. At last the English traders lost all patience with the corrupt Mughal government and resorted to arms. The war continued till 1690 when peace was finally concluded. Job Charnock arrived at Sutanauti on 24 August 1690 and laid the foundation of Calcutta.

It was during the reign of Shah Jahan that Orissa was conquered anew and it was annexed to the province of Bengal. Prince Shuja's position being immediately below the emperor's it owed

Orissa reconquered the rebels and mal-contents into voluntary submission. And this is quite evident in the case of Bahadur Khan, the zamindar of Hijli. The latter held an independent sway over the entire coastal region from the Rupnarayan to the Suvarnareka river. He was the last of the independent landlords to be crushed. He assumed the title of Masnad-i-Ala and declared himself as an independent sultan. His estate being confined in the unsubdued and uncared-for province of Orissa, Bahadur Khan felt himself secured in his estate and hence continued defying the Mughal viceroy of Bengal so long. Till the end of Jahangir's reign, Mughal rule was not firmly established in the whole of Orissa. There were Mughal officers and faujdars posted in some parts of Orissa, but the Mughal viceroys paid little interest in the management of the province effectively. As a result, in some parts a number of landlords were holding practically independent sway. Of these landlords, Bahadur Khan was very prominent. In 1651 when Orissa was assigned to Shuja in addition to Bengal, he tried to bring Bahadur Khan to book. The court historian of Shah Jahan writes: "The Zamindar of Hijli used to serve under the Subahdar of Orissa and pay tribute. When the province of Orissa was assigned to Prince Mahammad Shuja, he demanded an enhancement of the former tribute. The Zamindar delayed payment. Jan Beg, who was administrating Orissa on behalf of Shuja, was ordered to arrest him and send a detachment to conquer Hijli. This was done and Bahadur was kept in prison." But during the period of confusion caused by the civil war among the sons of Shah Jahan, Bahadur Khan escaped from his confinement and recovered his estate. Nothing could be done against him during the

civil war. It was Mir Jumla who at last succeeded in completely subduing Bahadur Khan and thereby imperial hold over Orissa was firmly established.

It was in the reign of Shah Jahan that the tribal zamindars like those of Morang, Kachar and other places, who so long evaded paying Tribal rulers' tribute to the imperial government, were compelled submission to pay tribute and acknowledge the overlordship of the Mughal Emperor.

## CHAPTER 5

### MUGHAL NORTH EASTERN FRONTIER POLICY

The history of Mughal North-east frontier policy is the story of Mughals' relations with the three Mongoloid kingdoms of Kutch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam during a period of more than a century. These three kingdoms were closely situated beyond the frontier of Mughal Bengal and the contact between the Mughals and the first Mongoloid kingdom of Kutch Bihar during the reign of Akbar brought the former in contact with the other two kingdoms being contiguous to each other. And it was very natural that in the course of their career of territorial expansion, the Mughals would come into such contact. The history of Mughal north-east frontier policy opened with the establishment of a defensive alliance between Akbar and the Kuch King Naranarayan immediately after the Mughals had obtained *de jure* mastery over Bengal. Due to certain circumstances, the defensive alliance was followed by armed imperialism of the Mughals in the north-east frontier. Kuch Bihar was subsequently made an appanage to the Mughal empire first and subjugated next, Kamrup conquered and annexed to the empire and Assam raided often, partially conquered but in the end repulsed with loss of territory on the part of the Mughals. So the drama ultimately ended in a tragedy.

Before we proceed with the narration of the drama, it is necessary to know in brief something about the region covered by those Mongoloid kingdoms. It is a land of great length but very little breadth and is watered by the mighty river Brahmaputra. The greater part of the region is bounded on three sides, north, east and south, by high hills covered with dense forests, while on the west, it is the river Karatoya which separated Mughal Bengal from the frontier tract. Ghoraghat, on the right bank of the Karatoya, at present included in the Rangpur district, was a fortified post of the Mughals touching the fringe of the Kuch Bihar kingdom. The reason of contiguity brought Kuch Bihar first within the pale of Mughal frontier policy in the north-east.

From a geographical point of view, the north-eastern tract may be broadly divided into two zones—the Brahmaputra valley and the

land lying to its west stretching right upto the Karatoya river. The old Kuch Bihar kingdom covered this portion of the frontier tract. The other division begins from the east of the confluence of the river Sankosh and the Brahmaputra right upto the extreme north-eastern hills. This portion covered the kingdoms of Kamrup and Assam.

The kingdom of Kuch Bihar or Kamta comprised the territory bounded by the river Karatoya on the west and the river Sankosh on the east with Bihar as its capital. The kingdom of Kamrup, an offshoot of the Kuch Bihar kingdom, was bounded by the river Sankosh on the west and the Barnadi on the east with Baranagar as its capital. The river Sankosh may be regarded as the cultural barrier between Bengal and the North-east frontier tract. East of the Barnadi lay the kingdom of the Ahoms with Garhgaon as its capital. During our period, the Koches and Meches inhabited the region west of the Barnadi, i.e. Kuch Bihar and Kamrup. While the region east of the Barnadi was inhabited by the Ahoms, although the original inhabitants were the Kolitas, who according to Cal. Dalton "are the only pure descendants of the Aryans who first colonised Assam".

The Koches<sup>1</sup> rose into prominence under their leader Biswa Singh sometimes in the beginning of the 16th century, while the Ahoms, the people of the Shan province of the kingdom of Burma, descended upon the upper Brahmaputra valley under their leader Sukapha sometimes in the middle of the 13th century and gradually built up a mighty kingdom. A few centuries later, their descendants brought the whole valley under their effective rule and formed a strong barrier against the eastward expansion of the Mughals.

Geography, doubtless, influenced the frontier's relations with the Mughals and it was a potent factor in the development of the political and social life of its people. The fact of contiguity to Bengal made Kuch Bihar's political intercourse with Bengal almost miserable. Again, it was through Kuch Bihar that Bengal came into direct contact with the Ahom Kingdom. The Sultans of Bengal made Kuch Bihar a military base for invading Assam, while the Mughals with a view

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<sup>1</sup> There is a difference of opinion among the chroniclers regarding the origin of the Koch and Mech. According to Risley, the Koch are "of Mongoloid-Dravidian origin with the Dravidian element preponderant in them." While Waddel believes them to be as "distinctly Mongoloid." According to Dalton, they were Dravidian in origin. It would not be wrong to suppose that the "true Koches were a (pure) Mongoloid race very closely allied to the Meches and the Garos." Gradually they became Hinduised and they got mixed up with the original people of the neighbouring regions.



to extend their sway across north-eastern India, treated Kuch Bihar more favourably.

### *Early Muslim Contacts with N. E. Frontier*

Long before the appearance of the Mughals in the north-east frontier region, the Mongoloid states of the frontier had to face aggressions of the Turko-Afghan Sultans of Bengal from time to time. In fact, the north-eastern frontier policy was initiated by the Sultans of Bengal and it was only pursued with more zeal and determination by the Mughal imperialists. On this issue, there was a difference between the policy pursued by the Turko-Afghan Sultans of Bengal and that by the Mughals. Most of the Muslim invasions before the advent of the Mughals were in the nature of material greed and religious frenzy. Sometimes they successfully plundered the kingdom of Kamrup, demolished the places of worship and retreated with a large booty. While sometimes they were beaten back and retreated with huge loss. But the Mughals were more interested in territorial expansion than in raids and plunders. The question of religion was less significant with the Mughals. They appeared in the frontier as imperialists than as religious propagators. Of course, some of the Muslim Sultans of Bengal appeared in the north-east frontier as conquerors. The names of Ikhtiyaruddin Yuzbak (1251-1256) and Allauddin Husain Shah (1493-1518) may be mentioned in this connection.

Ikhtiyaruddin Yuzbak, a strong and ambitious ruler of Bengal, made the first real attempt to conquer Kamrup. In 1256 he crossed the river Karatoya at the head of a large army and entered Kamrup almost unopposed. The ruler of Kamrup took refuge in the neighbouring hills. The kingdom was so rich and flourishing that the Sultan thought of annexing it to the kingdom of Lakhnawati. Accordingly he built a mosque and issued coins in his name. But this maiden attempt to permanently subjugate Kamrup ultimately ended in a disaster. Soon the invaders were beaten back and the Sultan was made a captive.

The next attempt to conquer the frontier tract was made by one of the greatest Sultans of Bengal, Alauddin Husain Shah in 1498 A.D. The Bengal Sultan launched a vigorous campaign and seized the capital of the Khem King of Kamrup through treachery. The whole kingdom as far as Hajo was permanently annexed. A large number of Afghans

Ikhtiyaruddin  
Yuzbak and  
N.E. Frontier

Allauddin Husain  
Shah and N. E.  
Frontier

were left in Kamrup who dispossessed the Hindu landlords and turned Kamrup into a province of Bengal. But the conqueror was not contented with merely conquering Kamrup. He followed his success by marching upon the neighbouring kingdom of the Ahoms and reached as far as the Barnadi. Unable to withstand the Muslim aggression, the Ahom king withdrew to the hills. The occupation of the Ahom kingdom, however, proved untenable, for with the advent of the monsoons, the Ahoms came out from the hills and fell upon the Muslim forces with great ferocity. The Muslim forces, failing to withstand the attack, had to bid a speedy retreat.

### *The Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*

As stated earlier, the history of the Mughal north-eastern frontier policy is a story of Mughals' relations with the frontier kingdoms of Kuch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam. It was very natural that after the conquest of Bengal proper, the Mughals would proceed further to round off their conquests in the east. After the overthrow of the Karrani dynasty in 1575, the Mughals stepped into the shoes of the Afghan power and thus came into contact with the Hindu kingdoms beyond the north-eastern border of Bengal. "The veil of separation that so long existed between the Mughal empire and the Koch and Ahom powers was now lifted and the genesis of the Mughal north-eastern frontier policy was almost unwillingly laid."<sup>1</sup>

### THE MUGHALS AND KUCH BIHAR

Being contiguous to Bengal, it was natural that the Mughals would first come into contact with the kingdom of Kuch Bihar. The Mughal policy towards Kuch Bihar was never fixed—it took its shape from time to time. In the beginning of Akbar's reign the Mughal empire and the Kuch kingdom formed a defensive alliance on the basis of perfect equality. Towards the close of Akbar's reign the defensive alliance was transformed into a subordinate one—the Kuch king almost accepted Mughal vassalage without, of course, any payment of tribute. In the reign of Jahangir, the subordinate alliance was again transformed into an aggressive one and ultimately Kuch Bihar was turned into a tributary vassal state of the Mughals.

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, p. 95.

Biswa Singh, the founder of the Kuch royal house pursued a pacific policy towards the Muslim kingdom of Lakhnawati with a view to secure his western frontier against the hostile Ahom power on his eastern frontier. And this policy gave Biswa Singh a good dividend. Like his father, Naranarayan, the ruler of Kuch Bihar and Akbar's contemporary also followed a pacific policy towards the Mughals. Accordingly, he refused asylum to the defeated Afghan rebels and malcontents after the fall of Daud Karrani. These Afghans, being hotly chased by the imperialists crossed the river Karatoya and took refuge in the Kuch kingdom.<sup>1</sup> This was the first step on the part of the Kuch king Naranarayan in courting friendship of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Four years later, Raja Naranarayan, with a view to please Akbar sent an embassy to the imperial court with rich presents.<sup>2</sup> The Mughal emperor was highly pleased and reciprocated the friendly gesture of the Kuch king. A friendly and defensive alliance on the basis of equal terms was concluded between the two powers.<sup>3</sup>

The Kuch king was not required to acknowledge the overlordship of the Mughal emperor. There was no mention of tribute, territorial concession or any other symbol of political tutelage.<sup>4</sup> In fact, political expediency made the two kings to come to an understanding. Although, Daud Khan, the leader of the Afghans in Bengal was no more, his Afghan followers and some powerful Hindu landlords were too firmly entrenched in the soil to be rooted out without a protracted struggle. In fact, the Afghan royal power subverted in West Bengal and Orissa was established anew in East Bengal under the leadership of Isa Khan of Sonargaon, and the Afghans still continued to be the sleepless disturbers of the Mughal peace during this period. Hence in order to prevent the Bengal rebels from taking asylum in the neighbouring state of Kutch Bihar, Akbar welcomed the friendly gesture of the Kuch king. On the other hand, the Kuch king, in his desire to have a powerful ally against the menace of the Ahoms, whose king was always on the lookout for creating troubles for the Kuch king by harbouring political offenders in his kingdom, looked to the Mughals as a strong weapon of defence against the Ahom state.

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, F. N., p. 98.

Both sides were thus anxious to solve their respective political troubles with mutual assistance and hence the ground was prepared for such alliance in 1578 A. D. After the conclusion of the alliance, Raja Naranarayan sent a few war-boats to help the Mughals against Masum Khan Kabuli.<sup>1</sup>

About this time, there came a partition of the Kuch kingdom and that brought about a change in the Mughal frontier policy.

Partition of the Kuch State and change in Mughal policy

Raghudev, the nephew of Raja Naranarayan curbed out a principality for his own from the parent Kuch state and this new state came to be known as Kamrup. He fixed his capital at Baranagar. Now he resorted to all sorts of subversive activities against his uncle

Raja Naranarayan. The partition henceforth gave rise to conflict between the two states of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup and thereby invited foreign intervention, the Mughals on the side of Kuch Bihar and the Ahoms on the side of Kamrup. The rivalry between Kuch Bihar and Kamrup brought about a change in the Mughal policy which assumed more and more an aggressive nature.

So long as Naranarayan was alive, the Mughals respected the treaty of alliance on the terms of perfect equality. Raja Naranarayan died in 1587. His son and successor Lakshminarayan

Subordinate alliance with the Mughals 1596-1608

was weak in diplomacy and incapable as a ruler. His weakness soon roused his rival Raghudev into action. The latter declared his independence, came to an understanding with the Ahom king and Isa Khan

of Sonargaon and made attempts to conquer Bahirband in the possession of Lakshminarayan. Realising his inaptitude against this formidable combination, Lakshminarayan sought Mughal help even at the cost of his independent status. Accordingly, the Kuch king waited on the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, Raja Man Singh in 1596, acknowledged Mughal suzerainty and gave his sister in marriage to Man Singh.<sup>2</sup> The Mughal viceroy was satisfied with a verbal submission of the Kuch king, and did not insist on payment of tribute and allowed him to go back with honour.

Meanwhile Raghudev made an attack upon Bahirband, whereupon Raja Lakshminarayan appealed to Man Singh for help which the latter complied with. Raghudev was compelled to withdraw from Bahirband (May 1597). Isa Khan, however, came forward to the

<sup>1</sup> Akbarnama, III, p. 621.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 1067.

assistance of Raghudev. A Mughal army was detached against Sonargaon. A fierce battle ensued (September 1597) which ended in the total defeat of the imperialists and a large number of imperial soldiers fell prisoners into Isa's hands. Isa Khan, however, thought it prudent to make peace. He released the imperial prisoners, abandoned his attack upon Lakshminarayan and offered submission to the Mughal emperor.<sup>1</sup>

With the coming of Islam Khan as viceroy of Bengal in 1608, the defensive frontier policy of the Mughals was transformed into an aggressive one. The new viceroy was determined to extend the territorial limits of the Mughal empire in the north-east by thoroughly annexing the Hindu principalities of that region. Kuch Bihar, being nearest of them, naturally fell a victim to this aggressive policy first. The formal acknowledgement of the suzerainty of the Mughal emperor by the Kuch king was not deemed enough by Islam Khan. As a matter of fact, he went a step further and deprived Lakshminarayan of personal freedom, kept him confined at Dacca and posted imperial officers in Kuch Bihar. And this happened in a very unusual circumstance. Raghudev's son Parikshit who ascended the throne of Kamrup was more ambitious and violent than his father. Following his father's hostile policy, Parikshit made an attack upon Bahirband. Failing to withstand the aggression of Parikshit, Lakshminarayan accompanied by Raja Raghunath of Shushang (a Mughal vassal) waited on Islam Khan and accepted Mughal vassalage by paying a tribute. This incident was the signal of aggressive imperialism of the Mughals and henceforth systematic and persistent efforts were afoot at territorial expansion in the north-east frontier tract. The year 1609 marked the end of Kuch Bihar's independence.

Henceforth, Raja Lakshminarayan continued to take part in the Mughal campaigns in the frontier tract as a true vassal. He played a conspicuous part in the Mughal campaigns against Parikshit of Kamrup in 1612. Lakshminarayan was entrusted with the administration of the territory east of the river Manas and he was asked by Islam Khan to come to Dacca to be formally invested with his new assignment. Before Lakshmi-

Aggressive  
imperialism  
1608-1617

End of  
Kuch Bihar's  
independence

Confinement  
of Kuch king  
and revolt in  
Kuch Bihar

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1094.

narayan could reach Dacca, Islam Khan died. The new viceroy Qasim Khan immediately upon his arrival at Dacca summoned Raja Lakshminarayan whom he confined and placed under surveillance. This incident brought about a new phase in the Kuch-Mughal relations. The Kuch vassal was brought down to the level of an ordinary political offender and he was deprived of his personal liberty and his realm when he was expecting reward for his active assistance to the imperialists in Kamrup.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, a formidable rebellion broke out in Kuch Bihar as a protest against the confinement of the Kuch king. This rebellion shook the newly established Mughal authority in the north-eastern frontier to its very foundations. With great difficulty the rebellion was suppressed and Lakshminarayan was sent to Delhi where he stayed for about two years. At last, on the representation of the next Mughal viceroy Ibrahim Khan to the emperor, Raja Lakshminarayan was released and re-instated in his kingdom.

The Kuch king rendered valuable services to the Mughal government in Kamrup and continued to stay as a vassal king at Hajo. Towards the end of Ibrahim Khan's vicerealty, Prince Shah Jahan rebelled in Bengal and following the example of the Mughal generals, Lakshminarayan also joined the rebel prince. But as soon as the rebel prince retired finally from Bengal, Lakshminarayan lost no time in rejoining the emperor and to whom he remained loyal till his death in 1627. Due to heavy preoccupations of the imperialists in Kamrup, the Mughal government had no other alternative than adopting a conciliatory attitude towards the Kuch king.

During the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the Mughals were mostly preoccupied with the Ahoms in the frontier. Hence they realised that a friendly and contended Kuch power was the best guarantee for the imperial success against the Ahoms. Birnarayan, the son and successor of Lakshminarayan, continued his vassalage paying regular tributes to the Mughal emperor. Birnarayan was succeeded by his son Prannarayan in 1633. During the early years of his rule, Prannarayan continued the traditional loyalty to the Mughals. The latter, on the other hand, could not afford to give any cause of offence to the Kuch vassal because of their own difficulties like revolts and rebellions in Kamrup, war with the Portuguese in Hughly and hostilities

Mughal Policy  
towards Kuch  
Bihar, 1627-1711

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

of the Ahom. Till the war of succession broke out among the sons of Shah Jahan, Prannarayan continued his friendly association with the Mughals. But he took advantage of the war of succession to reconquer Kamrup and thereby he came into clash with the Mughals. Mir Jumla, the Bengal viceroy, was ordered by the emperor Aurangzeb to punish the Kuch king. Mir Jumla entered the Kuch capital in 1661 practically unopposed. The kingdom was annexed to the empire, coins were struck in the emperor's name and the city's name was changed to Alamgirnagar. Mir Jumla's Kuch expedition was a turning point in the history of that state, "when, after a period of independent tenure for nearly three quarters of a century and of faithful vassalage for half a century more, its very existence was threatened by the suzerain power." The event was of great import in the history of Mughal north-east frontier policy as well. There was a recrudescence of the policy of aggressive imperialism after the lapse of nearly half a century and Kuch Bihar, as before, was its first victim.<sup>1</sup> But after the death of Mir Jumla, Kuch Bihar was recovered by its Raja and the Mughal garrison was expelled. Nothing could be done in regard to Kuch Bihar till Shaista Khan's arrival in Bengal in 1664. The Kuch king sent to Shaista Khan letters of submission and apology, promising a tribute of five lakhs and a half. Thus after a short spell of independence, Kuch Bihar once again was turned into a vassal state of the empire.

But the Kuch king Mahendranarayan, the great-grandson of Prannarayan, stopped paying tribute. As a result, a Mughal expedition was sent in 1691. Kuch Bihar was placed in charge of a Mughal faujdar and direct Mughal rule continued till Aurangzeb's death. Kuch Bihar regained its independence under Rupnarayan. Murshid Kuli Khan in his eagerness to augment the imperial revenue, cast his wistful eyes on Kuch Bihar and sent an expedition there. After years of skirmishes on both sides, a treaty was finally concluded in 1711 whereby Kuch Bihar ceded three chaklas of Fathpur, Kazirhat and Kankina, while tribute was promised for some former Kuch territory in the modern district of Rangpur. Since then no further encroachment was made or any offensive was launched upon Kuch Bihar and its independence was respected. In fact, Murshid Kuli Khan in his

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

bid to annex Kuch Bihar achieved only a partial success. Mughal-Kuch relations practically came to close.

### THE MUGHALS AND KAMRUP

The Kamrup state was an offshoot of the parent Kuch state created by Raja Raghudev in the life-time of the Kuch king Naranarayan.

Genesis of Mughal policy towards Kamrup

It was with a view to satisfy the territorial ambition of his own nephew that Raja Naranarayan allowed a partition of his kingdom. But unfortunately, in spite of being pacified, Raghudev and his successors remained all along hostile towards the Kuch royal house and this rivalry and antagonism between these two frontier states invited intervention and aggression of their two mighty neighbouring powers—the Mughals on the West and the Ahoms on the east. For most of the time during our period, the Mughals treated Kuch Bihar as a buffer vassal state. But they pursued an aggressive policy towards Kamrup and ultimately absorbed Kamrup and then making Kamrup an advanced base, the Mughals proceeded against the Ahom kingdom.

Factors influencing Neo-Kuch Afghan alliance

So long as Raja Naranarayan was alive, Raghudev dared not create much trouble. But he resolved to take full advantage of the weak regime of Raja Lakshminarayan to strike further blow at the territorial integrity of Kuch Bihar. The only way to meet the situation and to provide against the inevitable growth of the Kuch-Mughal alliance was to throw in his (Raghudev's) lot with the rebel Afghans. Accordingly, Raghudev formed an alliance with Isa Khan of Sonargaon, the sleepless enemy of the Mughal peace in Bengal. Isa was in a position to help Raghudev with men and money as well as to make an effective diversion in his favour, if necessary, by attacking the imperial territories in South-eastern Bengal. In fact, Isa was already prejudiced against the Kuch State owing to its long standing friendship with the Mughal empire. The gradual expansion of the Mughal domain was a cause of much embarrassment to Isa Khan as it posed a great threat to his own security. Hence common interests bound Raghudev to Isa Khan. Further, though primarily a weapon of defence, the new alliance might also be used as an instrument of offence and Isa might justify his thirst for territories at the cost of the Kuch State. "So the neo-Kuch-Afghan alliance was soon an accomplished fact."



But the death of the Isa made Raghudev friendless and kept him isolated for sometime, while a renewed Kuch-Mughal aggression was hanging over his head. But Raghudev soon managed to get the Ahom King Sukhapa into an alliance. He sent an envoy to the Ahom king and offered him his daughter in marriage which the Ahom king accepted and thus an alliance came into being. The Ahom king was being alarmed at the growing intervention of the Mughals in Kuch policies and hence the necessity for strengthening Kamrup as a sort of buffer state had already been brought home to him.<sup>1</sup> Raghudev, however, did not long survive the neo-Kuch-Afghan alliance. He died in 1603 A.D. Raghu's reign marked the first phase of Mughal policy characterised by a state of indirect hostility towards Kamrup.

As yet, the Mughals had not directly come into armed clash with Kamrup. It was only in support of their protege Raja Lakshminarayan that they had come into indirect clash. Yet the relations between Kamrup and the Mughals were strained almost to the breaking point. "He (Raghudev) thus may be said to have sowed the wind, while his unfortunate son and heir Parikshitnarayan reaped the whirlwind."<sup>2</sup>

Raja Parikshitnarayan inherited from his father an enemy towards Lakshminarayan. Parikshit also shared his father's fears and apprehensions about the imperialistic designs of the Mughals. Being convinced of Mughal aggressive policy, Parikshit wasted no time in strengthening his fortifications and raising a vast army. He began the offensive by repeating his father's ventures upon Bahirband. He renewed his father's friendship with the Ahom king also. Meanwhile Parikshit's relations with the Mughals worsened. His attack upon Bahirband on the one hand, and Islam Khan's strong desire for territorial expansion in the frontier, on the other, brought the two parties to open rupture. Islam Khan demanded the surrender of Parikshit and upon the latter's refusal Mughal aggressions upon Kamrup began. "The rich and flourishing kingdom of Kamrup, occupying the lower Bramaputra valley and teeming with elephants and aromatic plants must be wiped off and made a part and parcel of the empire. This was the real aim of the Mughals." The short punitive campaign sent by the Mughal viceroy in 1609 under Abdul

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

Wahid produced no satisfactory results. But Islam Khan did not give up his design. The submission of Raja Pratapaditya followed by the death of Khwaja Usman in 1612 A.D., made the viceroy free to pursue his Kamrup venture. The immediate pretext of the Mughal expedition was the seizure of the family of Raja Raghunath of Shushang, a Mughal vassal by Parikshit. Upon the appeal of Raghunath, Islam Khan sent an army against Kamrup—under Mukarram Khan with Shaikh Kamal as second in command. The imperial army consisted of 1000 picked cavalry, 5000 musketeers, 300 war elephants and 400 imperial boats, besides 100 war-boats of Musa Khan. A large number of imperial officers and vassal zamindars were impressed into the imperial service.

In December 1612, the imperial army advanced by way of Bhawal and Tok till they reached Salkona. Here the Kamrup fleet offered resistance. But after a stiff fighting, the Kamrup fleet was overpowered. From Salkona, the imperial army proceeded cautiously and arrived at the neighbourhood of Dhubri. The fort of Dhubri was strongly fortified and its siege dragged on for a few months. In spite of heavy cannonading from the side of the invaders, the gate of the fort could not be forced open. The imperialists continued to suffer much casualties. However, after a hard encounter, the Mughals succeeded in besieging the fort from all sides and at last made a desperate charge upon the Kamrup garrison. Unable to withstand the continuous attack, the Kamrup soldiers left their position and were put to flight. The Mughals took possession of the fort.

After this victory, most of the imperial officers suggested an immediate attack upon the capital of Parikshit before he could recover from the shock of the loss of the Dhubri fort. But the imperial commander, in consideration of his personal convenience, did not accept the suggestion and sent an envoy to Parikshit with the following message : “It is clear to you that tonight either you will be made a captive or you shall have to evacuate the fort of Gilah (10 miles north of Dhubri) and go your way to the desert as a vagrant. You must thank God that I am showing this great favour to you and saving you from extirpation. If even now you behave properly, it is well and good; otherwise you do not know what will happen.”<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Baharistan*, I, p. 239.

moral effect of the defeat at Dhubri was tremendous for Parikshit and his confidence in himself was greatly shaken. Hence he readily responded to the call of Shaikh Kamal and showed his submissiveness. In addition to costly presents, Parikshit sent 80 thousand rupees to Shaikh Kamal. He also agreed to pay one lakh of rupees along with 100 elephants, 100 horses and "his sister as a bride for Islam Khan". Parikshit further agreed to pay three lakhs of rupees to the emperor and "his daughter as a bride, on condition that he was to be excused from attending the imperial court and his territory left to him".<sup>1</sup>

Shaikh Kamal became highly pleased and an agreement was thus arrived at. But Islam Khan sternly rejected the peace offer, admonished Shaikh Kamal for his leniency towards Parikshit and demanded the surrender of Parikshit's person as well as of his domain.

Shaikh Kamal felt himself very much insulted and he tried to hamper the imperial campaign against Raja Parikshit. Although under the order of the viceroy, Shaikh Kamal joined the imperial army and apprised Parikshit of the hostile design of the imperialists, advised him thus : "Do not slip any opportunity that comes to you." Shaikh Kamal in a malicious spirit took back the gun-powder and shots from the gunners and cannoniers on the plea that there was no war at that time and concealed them. But ultimately he could not prevent the resumption of hostilities against Parikshit. The design of Shaikh Kamal was that some disaster should fall upon the imperial commanders and Islam Khan would be forced to give up his plan of conquering Kamrup. But when Raja Lakshminarayan, in accordance with his previous agreement to help the imperialists, made an assault on the pargana of Khonthaghat on the western border of Kamrup, the war with Parikshit was practically resumed. Parikshit advanced from Gilah to oppose Lakshminarayan and put the Kuch king to such a plight that the latter had to appeal to Islam Khan for help. An adequate force with 200 war-boats was despatched under the command of Raja Satrajit with instructions to erect a fort at Kharbuzaghat (in the district of Goalpara) and to attack Parikshit from the rear. While Raja Satrajit was taking his position at Kharbuzaghat with his army, Parikshit made a violent attack upon the

Shaikh Kamal's  
hostile attitude

Resumption of  
hostilities with  
Parikshit

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

imperialists. But he was repulsed with a heavy loss. Being helpless, Parikshit abandoned the siege and retired to Gilah.

Under the instructions of Islam Khan, the zamindars of Eastern Bengal proceeded with their own war-boats to the mouth of the river Gadadhar. Opposite to Gilah, they raised a fort and blocked the passage of the transport of provisions to the city of Gilah and thereby put Parikshit to a very difficult situation. Being desperate, Parikshit planned a night attack upon the imperial fort. He marched with a large army including one lakh and fifty thousand paiks, five thousand musketeers and three hundred elephants. Parikshit's sudden attack completely disorganised the fleet of the zamindars. It was a complete rout. Of the 250 boats of the zamindars, only 43 could escape destruction. The Kamrup fleet gave a hot chase to the fleeing imperialists. Mirza Nathan ordered his aritillerymen to begin fire, but it was of no avail. Dimarua Raja, son-in-law of Parikshit who gained solid success against the zamindars' fleet before, arrived on the spot. The fleet of the zamindars with their past experience dared not face the Dimarua Raja and hence fled away at the appearance of the enemy's fleet. But in the thick of fighting a cannon ball struck the Dimarua Raja in the breast and he was killed. This unfortunate incident paralysed the Kamrup fleet and it hastily withdrew. The Kamrup king decided to abandon fighting altogether and hastily retreated to Gilah leaving his army in utter confusion.<sup>1</sup>

Next morning, the imperialists resumed their march towards Gilah. But before they could reach Gilah, Parikshit retreated towards his capital Baranagar. Thus the fort of Gilah with immense war materials fell into the hands of the imperialists. The latter pursued Parikshit and the imperial fleet under Mirza Qasim Khazanchi and Raja Satrajit proceeded along the Brahmaputra tried to obstruct Parikshit from going to Kamrup. The imperial fleet proceeded as far as to Pandu. Worn out in body and mind, Parikshit thought it useless to offer any more resistance and hence he decided on an unconditional surrender. He sent his envoy Ramdas to the imperial commanders Mukarram Khan and Shaikh Kamal and made the following representation : "If I am given an assurance by the Khan and Bakshi of the safety of my life and honour, I shall submit and surrender all my

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 248.

belongings and territory to the imperialists.”<sup>1</sup> The imperial commanders sent many encouraging words to Parikshit and it was decided that he should surrender himself on the bank of the river Manas. But as a guarantee against reprisals he should surrender all his elephants. Accordingly, Parikshit handed over all his elephants and he waited on the imperial commanders. The latter assured Raja Parikshit of his safety. Thus Kamrup lost its independence and it was annexed to the Mughal empire. Imperial officers were posted in different parts of the state. The imperial commanders brought Parikshit to Dacca where he was presented to the new viceroy Qasim Khan.

The defeat and submission of Raja Parikshit made the Mughals nominal ruler of Kamrup over a territory stretching from the Kari Bari hills on the south-west to the bank of the Barnadi on the east. It formed the first north-east frontier province of Mughal India and the Mughal administration was set up gradually in the conquered tract. The territories to the west of the river Manas were placed in charge of Abdus Salam, while those to the east of the river (comprising Kamrup proper) were temporarily put in charge of Kuch Bihar king Lakshminarayan. A Mughal fleet was stationed at Pandu to maintain the line of communication with Bengal as well as to put down internal rebellion in Kamrup.

However, from the beginning of their rule, the Mughals had to experience serious difficulties in Kamrup. The seizure of Parikshit’s two strongholds, Dhubri and Gilah did not however bring the conquest to a satisfactory conclusion. There flourished a large number of Kuch chieftains who sometimes instigated by Balinarayan, Parikshit’s brother and sometimes by the Ahoms, continued to trouble the Mughals there. Besides, the political chaos which followed Parikshit’s downfall in Kamrup and its climatic conditions were also disturbing factors for the Mughals. Over and above “the bitter rivalry and jealousy and the incessant petty strifes of the imperial officers made efficient and stable government impossible in Kamrup”. In fact, the Mughals remained in Kamrup like an army of occupation.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

A new enemy appeared on the scene in the person of Balinarayan, the young brother of Parikshit. Incidentally, after the overthrow of Parikshit, Balinarayan sought refuge with the Ahom king and the latter installed him as a tributary ruler in Darrang. "From this time till his death (1638), he was the most persistent enemy of the Mughal peace in Kamrup and was a nightmare to the thanadars there."<sup>1</sup> Supported and strengthened by the Ahom king, Balinarayan carried on incessant raids upon Kamrup. He was at the root of most of the risings in Kamrup. Sometimes by direct assault and sometimes by secret help offered to the hill-chieftains of Dhanikol, Balinarayan kept the Mughals in Kamrup in a state of perpetual alarm. He almost continued an incessant warfare against the imperialists to recover his ancestral domain. The author of the *Baharistan* has paid an eloquent tribute to Balinarayan's personal valour, skilful leadership and patriotic feelings.

The Mughal disaster in Assam in 1615 encouraged Balinarayan in his offensives against the Mughals. He made an attack upon Kamrup from his stronghold of Sahorabari in Darrang. But he suffered defeat and took to flight. The offensive of Balinarayan encouraged the hill-chieftains to harass the Mughals in various ways. Mirza Nathan, the loyal Mughal officer in Kamrup, was the hero of this eventful period (1616-1627) and his daring initiative, great energy, tact and personal valour saved the imperial interests there. Although the hill-chieftains troubled the Mughals often, the real and formidable enemy of the Mughal peace in Kamrup was Balinarayan and his patron the Ahom king.

Notwithstanding his first failure, Balinarayan again appeared on the scene and laid siege to the Mughal outpost of Pandu. The siege was dragged on for some time, but at last he was compelled to raise it and make a hasty retreat. But soon the imperial thanadar Shaikh Ibrahim's rebellion gave Balinarayan another opportunity to make fresh attempts upon the Mughals. He fell upon Pandu and took possession of it without any resistance. In order to retain his new conquest, he appealed to the Ahom king for help. Accordingly, the latter sent a strong detachment under his able commander Burha Guhain and a grand attack was launched by land and water upon

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, p. 181.

Hajo. The imperialists at Hajo were reduced to great straits and it was about to fall. But the tide of fortune rolled back when Mirza Nathan came to their succour and the Ahom army was compelled to retreat. The imperialists gave a hot chase and in the melee that ensued, the Ahoms were routed and Burha Gohain was killed. Thus ended in failure the first decisive attempt made by Balinarayan to overthrow the Mughal power in Kamrup. Balinarayan escaped capture and he took refuge with his patron, the Ahom king.

The Ahoms, in support of Balinarayan, again marched upon Kamrup and laid siege to the Mughal outpost of Ranihat. For five months (May to September 1619) skirmishes continued in the vicinity of Ranihat leading to the ultimate victory of the Ahoms. This was the first serious disaster of the Mughals since the disastrous Ahom campaign of 1615. The loss of Ranihat was a severe blow to the imperial authority in Kamrup.

In January 1620, Balinarayan and an Ahom contingent besieged another Mughal outpost of Minari. The imperialists under Mirza Nathan made a vigorous attack upon the enemy fort. The Ahoms after a stubborn resistance sought safety in flight. This victory restored the prestige of the imperial arms and was the signal for another attempt to bring the hill-chieftains of Dhanikol under imperial sway. And within a short space of time, one by one all of them again tendered submission to the Mughals.

During the viceroyalty of Muhabat Khan in Bengal (1626), Balinarayan again came out of his refuge, marched across Dhanikol and seized Luki Duar (extreme south-west corner of Kamrup). Practically, the whole of Dhanikol was overrun by him. All the efforts of the imperialists to dislodge Balinarayan from Dhanikol proved abortive. Encouraged at the success of Balinarayan, the vassal landlords of Dhanikol broke off from the Mughal allegiance and stopped paying tribute.

Meanwhile emperor Jahangir died (1627) and with his death, the Kamrup-Mughal conflict seems to sink to the background and the Ahom-Mughal conflict came to the forefront which kept the Mughals preoccupied for a longer period of time.

*The Mughals and Assam*

The disappearance of the Kamrup kingdom and its annexation to the Mughal empire brought the Ahom kingdom within the pale of Mughal frontier policy which hence attained full scope in the north-eastern frontier. The Ahoms were the last of the frontier powers to come within the pale of the foreign policy of the Mughals but the direct contact between them did not begin till the absorption of the Kamrup state in the Mughal empire. Of course, it would be wrong to suppose that before their direct contact with each other, they were quite strangers when they met.

From the beginning relation between the Ahoms and the Mughals was hostile and that was due to certain factors, viz. Mughal's alliance with Kuch Bihar, the western enemy of the Ahoms and secondly the growing advance of the Mughals in the north-eastern frontier which alarmed them.

Beginning of  
Ahom-Mughal  
contact

While the Mughals supported Lakshminarayan, the Ahom king Sukapha entered into a marriage alliance with the Kuch king's enemy Raghudev and this dynastic alliance was renewed afterwards by the next Ahom king Susenpha (Pratap Singh) who married a daughter of Raja Parikshit. From the time the Mughals appeared in the north-eastern frontier, a state of indirect rivalry and hostility began between the Mughals and the Ahoms. But this state of things did not last long. It gave way to direct and undisguised enmity which was the key note of the second phase of the Ahom-Mughal politics.

Two years after the final defeat of Parikshit (1613) the first organised Mughal attack upon Assam was made with a view to conquer that kingdom. It was the outcome of the aggressive imperialism of the Mughals. "An unholy desire for political supremacy and territorial expansion appears to have been the guiding motive of the Mughals."

Causes of  
friction

Boundary disputes and trade rivalries appear to have complicated the situation and at last political issue precipitated the conflict. After the extinction of the Kamrup monarchy, the Mughals came to regard the territories east of the Barnadi upto Singiri as part of the conquered region and hence asserted their political right over it. The Ahoms strongly resented this claim. Moreover the rich natural resources of the Assam valley excited the cupidity of the Mughals and they were determined to force open the door of Assam. But they achieved



little success and as a consequence a good deal of unauthorised trade was carried on by the Muslim traders in the Assam valley against repeated protests of the Ahom kings.

The pretext of the first organised open encounter with the Ahom kingdom was the well-deserved punishment meted out by the Ahom government to an unauthorised trader from Mughal India named Ratan Singh. His illicit trade was detected, his goods were confiscated and he was expelled from Assam. The Mughals got the necessary pretext of war and an imperial army was at once detached in 1615 under the command of Abu Bakr and Raja Satrajit of Bhusna. The army included 12 thousand cavalry, 200 musketeers and a fleet of 400 boats. The imperial army advanced towards Baranagar, the old capital of Kamrup and next moved to Hajo and numerous outposts were raised in the surrounding region. In November 1615 Abu Bakr suddenly fell upon Kajali, the Ahom frontier post on the south-east. After a short skirmish, the Ahoms were defeated and leaving their war-boats and the fort, they took to flight.<sup>1</sup> Flushed with easy success, the imperialists indulged in a series of aggressive measures against the Ahoms. Raja Satrajit with a number of war-boats continued plundering raids along the bank of the Kalang river and seized the fort of Sala with immense treasures. The Ahom king girded up his loins for a decisive engagement. He fortified his fort of Samdhara with a view to check the advance of the Mughals. Meanwhile the latter had reached the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Bharali, facing Samdhara. After a month's inaction the Mughals achieved a great triumph. They transported their horses across the Bharali and made a violent assault on the Ahom stockade on the left bank. The Ahoms thus suffered another discomfiture. The Ahom king sent a strong detachment to the Ahom commanders at Samdhara and exhorted them to fall on the enemy and fight to a finish. The Ahoms gained an initial success and reoccupied the stockade at the mouth of the Bharali. At the dead of a wintry night (1615), three bridges were thrown across the Bharali along which the Ahoms 30,000 strong with 700 war-elephants crossed over to the vicinity of the Mughal camp and made an assault on it. The imperialists were taken by complete surprise, and suffered heavy casualties. A huge amount of war-materials

First Ahom  
War, 1615

Mughal  
disaster

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

and elephants fell into the hands of the Ahoms. The Mughal commander Abu Bakr was slain unrecognised. Thus in spite of the initial success, the maiden attempt of the Mughals upon Assam ended in a disastrous failure. They suffered a colossal loss in men and money besides their military prestige.

After the first disastrous failure in Assam, the Mughals henceforth continued to follow a defensive and conciliatory policy in regard to the Ahom state. Because of their heavy engagement in Kamrup, the Mughals henceforward were very cautious not to offend their mighty neighbour. But the Ahoms, being encouraged at their recent brilliant success, continued to pursue a hostile policy against the Mughals and proceeded to take the advantage of the prevailing political confusion in Kamrup. The Assam disaster encouraged seditions and rebellions in Mughal-occupied Kamrup. The Ahoms encouraged the Kamrup rebels and thereby caused hardships to the Mughals. The Ahoms pursued this policy in an indirect and informal way. "For more than a decade, a sort of unofficial warfare went on in which the Ahom king fought the Mughals in Kamrup under the thin vaneer of an interferer on behalf of his proteges. There was hardly any open and direct conflict between the two powers as such."<sup>1</sup>

The Ahoms interfered in Kamrup in 1627 when an imperial officer Shaikh Ibrahim broke out in open rebellion. The rebel officer was helped by the Ahom king with elephants and war materials. In 1618 the Ahom king installed Balinarayan, the younger brother of Raja Parikshit at Darrang and continued to help him for some time to reoccupy Kamrup. But in spite of the Ahom king's material assistance, Balinarayan ultimately failed to reconquer Kamrup. The Ahoms interfered in Kamrup for the third time on behalf of the hill-chiefs of Dhanikol in 1619. The hill-chiefs, being sick of Mughal subjection made a bold attempt to seize the strategic hill fort of Ranihat and they sought the help of the Ahom king. The latter responded to the appeal and sent a large detachment to their assistance. After a hard fighting, the Mughals courted defeat and were compelled to evacuate Ranihat hotly pursued by the Ahoms. "The vanity of the Ahom King was gratified and he also recovered his military prestige."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 249.

But the Mughals soon gathered strength and recovered Dhanikol in spite of the stiff resistance of the Ahoms. Thus three attempts of the Ahoms at supplanting Mughal authority in Kamrup at last proved abortive. The Ahom king gradually withdrew from the arena of Kamrup policies leaving Balinarayan to his fate.

The reign of Shah Jahan marks a new epoch in Ahom-Mughal relations. After a decade of informal hostility, circumstances paved

Ahom-Mughal  
relations, 1627-  
1639

the way for the renewal of open conflict between the two powers. Authorities differ as to the circumstances which led to the resumption of hostility.

According to the *Badshanama*, two-fold factors, both political, appear to have been responsible for the conflict. The first was the asylum given by the Ahom king to the hill-chiefs of Dhanikol who had sought his protection against the ill-treatment of the Bengal viceroy Qasim Khan. The second factor which precipitated the crisis was the wickedness and treachery of Satrajit, the thanadar of Pandu who made a common cause with Balinarayan and instigated him to take advantage of the change of governor in Bengal in order to attack Kamrup. But the real pretext of the hostility was the arrogant attitude of the Ahom king and his flagrant violation of the ordinary canons of inter-state relations. The series of provocations offered by the Ahom king strained the feelings of the Mughals almost to a breaking point. At last the invasion of Kamrup by Balinarayan compelled the Mughals to resort to arms. The Ahoms gained initial success. Dhanikol was seized by them. Failing to withstand the vigorous assault of the Ahoms, the imperialists crossed the river Brahmaputra into Uttarkol leaving behind huge war materials into the hands of the Ahoms. The latter then pursued the imperialists and in Uttarkol also, they failed to check the advance of the Ahoms. Thereafter, the Ahoms commanded by Balinarayan encamped at Shonda enroute to Hajo. A hot encounter took place which ultimately ended in the total discomfiture of the imperialists. Thereupon, the latter fell back upon their frontier post of Hajo. The Ahoms laid siege to Hajo and fighting continued for some time. At last both sides having been thoroughly worn out, the fighting was stopped for some time.

With the arrival of reinforcements from Dacca, the second round of the Ahom-Mughal conflict started afresh towards the end of December 1636. The Mughals entered Kamrup proper. The decisive defeat inflicted by the imperialists on Balinarayan and the Ahoms in

November 1637 turned the tide of fortune in favour of the imperialists. The whole of Kamrup was cleared of the enemy and re-annexed to the Pax-Mughalia.

The third round of the conflict began soon. The imperialists advanced up the Brahmaputra and halted opposite to Samdhara in October 1638. A severe fighting ensued. Although the faint-hearted Ahom admiral retired from the battlefield, the garrison in the fort of Samdhara offered such a gallant defence that the Mughals had to give up the contest with a great loss of men and materials.

Both sides became eager for peace. Hence a treaty of peace was signed in February 1639 whereby the Ahom king for the first time acknowledged formally the Mughal overlordship in Kamrup, the Mughals acknowledged the independence of the Ahom king and gave up all pretensions to the territories east of the Barnadi on the north and Kalang on the south and the Ahom king agreed not to interfere in Kamrup. Besides trade and commercial intercourses were resumed.<sup>1</sup>

The Ahom-Mughal relation following the peace of 1639 was far from satisfactory. Although no direct clash broke out between them during this period owing largely to the exhaustions of the parties as well as the peculiar political conditions, it would be wrong to suppose that both sides strictly honoured the peace-treaty of 1639. "The keynote of the political history of this period is the endless crinations and recriminations of the Mughals and the Assamese on various rounds, viz, 'Kheda' operations, trade and commercial intercourse, boundary disputes, extradition of political offenders and violation of personal liberty and privileges of the subject people."<sup>2</sup> On these issues frictions continued mounting without of course any open armed-clash. It was really a period of armed-peace between the Mughals and the Ahoms. However, some sort of reciprocal amity continued between the two governments. In accordance with this policy, a mission from the imperial government visited the Ahom Court in 1647 with suitable presents for the reigning king. In 1648, the Mughal faujdar of Gauhati sent a message of congratulation to the Ahom king Jayadhwaj on his accession. In fact, internal troubles so much kept

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

the Ahom government engrossed that it could not afford to give the Mughals sufficient cause of resentment. On the other hand, the Bengal viceroy Prince Shuja was more preoccupied with financial reforms than any scheme of aggressive wars. Hence the internal problems in both sides compelled them to pursue a pacific policy to each other. This state of peace between the two lasted for a decade more till the end of the civil war among the sons of Shah Jahan.

With the coming of Mir Jumla as viceroy of Bengal the Mughal-Ahom hostility started afresh. It should be noted that after the departure of Prince Shuja from Bengal, the Ahoms resumed their aggressive activities against the Mughals and by 1660 both banks of the Brahmaputra passed into their hands silently. After the final expulsion of Prince Shuja, Mir Jumla was ordered by emperor Aurangzeb to punish the kings of Kuch Bihar and Assam. It is to be noted further that with the departure of Shuja from Bengal for contesting the throne of Delhi, the Kuch king Prannarayan made several incursions into Mughal territory in Kamrup with a view to recover it. Hence both the kings of Kuch Bihar and Assam incurred great displeasure of Aurangzeb.

The Ahom king Jayadhwaj, however, tried to keep the Mughal viceroy in good humour. He sent an embassy to Mir Jumla with costly presents and made a gesture for peace. He put the entire blame for the subversion of the Mughal authority in Kamrup on the shoulders of Prannarayan, and pleaded that he had taken possession of the imperial territory in order to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Kuch king. Mir Jumla was pleased with such pleadings of the Ahom king and reciprocated the friendly gesture of the latter. But truly speaking, the Ahom king was only gaining time for further aggressions and the motive of the Ahom king at last became clear to Mir Jumla. And hence, the Mughal viceroy began necessary preparations for the fresh north-eastern ventures.

The causes of the resumption of hostilities are varied in character. At the root of Mir Jumla's Assam campaign was his ambition to secure a base for an invasion upon Burma and China so as to immortalise his name and fame in the pages of history. There were other factors too. Emperor Aurangzeb was anxious to keep Mir Jumla engaged in foreign wars so as to get rid of the most powerful and as such dangerous of his friends. Whatever might have been the designs of Mir jumla

Last phase of  
Ahom-Mughal  
relations, 1658-  
1707

Causes of Assam  
campaign, 1662

and Aurangzeb, it cannot be denied that Mir Jumla's Assam campaign was aggressive in nature hidden under a defensive garb. Doubtless, the Ahom king Jayadhwaj was guilty of the violation of the treaty of 1639 by wresting Mughal territories on both the banks of the Brahmaputra river.

Mir Jumla made his preparations on a grand scale. He left Dacca in November 1661 at the head of a large army consisting of 12,000 horses and 30,000 infantry, a vast flotilla of war-boats and a powerful artillery. A large number of Dutch, English and Portuguese sailors and gunners were also impressed into the imperial army. In fact, on land and water alike the imperialists were irresistible.

Beginning of  
the campaign

Kamrup re-  
occupied

Advancing slowly, the Mughal army entered Kuch Bihar in December. The Kuch king and his family deserting the capital took refuge in the neighbouring hills. The kingdom was annexed to the Mughal empire, coins were struck in the name of Aurangzeb and the capital's name was changed to Alamgirnagar. After making necessary

arrangements for the civil and military administration of Kuch Bihar, Mir Jumla set out for the conquest of Assam in January 1662. The campaign was extremely hazardous and the soldiers had to experience unspeakable hardship and fatigue throughout the journey. The whole imperial army advanced and halted five miles west of Jogighopa, the Ahom fort of a great strategic importance. The Ahoms put up a gallant resistance. But unfortunately a pestilence had broken out in the ranks of the garrison there which reduced its number greatly. As a result, after a feeble resistance the fort of Jogighopa was surrendered and the Ahoms retreated to Srighat. Here the Ahoms put up another bold resistance and the Ahom king sent a fresh reinforcement. But before it could arrive, the Mughals made a violent attack upon the fort. The local garrison left the fort and fell back on Kajali, while the reinforcing army fell back on Samdhara. Having consolidated their position at Srighat, the imperialists made further advance and reoccupied Gauhati, the capital of Mughal Kamrup. Another branch of the imperial army moving along the south bank of the Brahmaputra occupied the fort of Pandu. The invaders then advanced towards the Ahom fort of Kajali which lay about 14 miles east of Pandu. Before the arrival of the imperial army, the local garrison at Kajali abandoned the fort. With the fall of Kajali, almost the whole of Kamrup came under the re-possession

of the Mughals. "The authority of the Mughal emperor was now restored and his military prestige re-established."

Being encouraged and emboldened at these easy success, Mir Jumla now made a grand plan of conquering Assam. The imperial army resumed the march without any resistance from the side of the Ahoms. Alarmed at the rapid advance of the imperialists, the Ahom king gathered all his officers and troops at Samdhara which held the key to his dominion. The Ahom king decided to make a firm stand at the stronghold of Simlagarh which commanded the route to his capital. In February 1662, Mir Jumla laid siege to Simlagarh and after severe hand-to-hand fight, the Ahoms abandoned the fort and took to flight. The imperialists entered the fort and took possession of huge war materials. The failure at Simlagarh sealed the fate of the Ahom land army which never ventured to face the imperialists in open encounter.<sup>1</sup> The imperialists continued their advance and in a river battle fought on 3 March 1662, the Ahom naval power was annihilated and 300 of their war-boats were seized.

After this brilliant success, Mir Jumla entered the Ahom capital Garhgaon on 17 March. The Ahom king Jayadhwaj took shelter in the eastern hills abandoning his capital and all his treasures. Immense spoils fell into the hands of the imperialists—82 elephants, about 3 lakhs of coins in gold and silver, 675 big guns, about 4750 maunds of powder in boxes, 7828 shields, 1000 and odd ships and 173 stores of paddy.<sup>2</sup>

But the imperialists conquered only the soil of the Ahom capital and neither the king nor the country. The rainy season was fast approaching and so Mir Jumla halted there and made necessary arrangements for holding the conquered land. He left the imperial navy under Ibn Husain at Lakhau and himself with the main army went into quarters at Mathurapur, seven miles south-east of Garhgaon. The Ahom capital was left in charge of an imperial detachment under Mir Murtaza. Communications with the imperial fleet at Lakhau as well as with Dacca were arranged. "The occupation of Garhgaon and Mathurapur is the central event in the history of Mir

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

Jumla's campaign. It marked the climax of his military success, but it was at the same time destined to be the beginning of the end."<sup>1</sup>

The torrential rains and the violence of the rivers caused immense hardship to the imperialists and the communications with the imperial fleet and Lakhau and with Dacca became completely disrupted. Serious epidemic and pestilence took away the lives of thousands of imperial soldiers and officers. For want of fodder, the Mughal cavalry horses and draught cattle alike perished by the thousand. In fact, during the entire rainy season, the imperial army in Assam lived in a state of siege and each of their outposts stood like an island surrounded by the flooded country.<sup>2</sup>

The Ahoms took the fullest advantage of the unspeakable hardship of the imperialists. Although their naval strength was greatly crippled due to their disastrous defeat on 3 March 1662, their land army remained unimpaired. They were yet far from being crushed. With the advent of the rains, the Ahoms resumed their offensive and drove out several of the imperial outposts, concentrated near Garhgaon and kept the imperialists in perpetual alarm by their night attacks. Carefully avoiding an open encounter, they lost no opportunity for disrupting communications and supplies. With the progress of the monsoon, it became well nigh impossible for the Mughals to come out of their outpost or send support to it. The Ahoms easily recovered all the country east of Lakhau. Only Garhgaon and Mathurapur remained in the possession of the imperialists. The Ahoms were not slow to take advantages of the miserable plight of the Mughals. Their king came out of his refuge in Kamrup to Solaguri, only four days' march from Garhgaon. He ordered his commanders to expel the invaders from his kingdom. Two attacks on 8 July and 12 July 1662 respectively on Garhgaon and Mathurapur were beaten off. But a serious epidemic broke out in the imperial camp at Mathurapur which took away the lives of hundreds of imperial soldiers. There was no suitable diet or comfort in the Mughal camp. According to the Faithiyah, "a similar case never happened before in the history of Delhi."<sup>3</sup> At last life became unbearable at Mathurapur and hence the Mughals abandoned it. The vigour of Ahom assault on Garhgaon

Crisis in  
Mughal  
camp

Ahom  
offensive

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 333-334.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, p. 88.



was now redoubled and there were skirmishes every night outside the fort. In the night of 12 July a grand assault on Garhgaon was made by the Ahoms, but it was gallantly met by the defenders. Another attempt was equally futile. The repeated failures cooled the ardour of the Ahoms.

By the end of September the worst was over. The rains decreased, the flood went down, roads reappeared and communications became easier. And in a few days the contact with the imperial fleet at Lakhau was restored which cheered the long-suffering Mughal garrison. The main imperial army under Mir Jumla joined the fleet at

Mir Jumla  
resumed  
offensive

Devalgaon. The Ahom king Jayadhvaj and his entourage took refuge in the hills again. Some of the Ahom generals deserted to the Mughals. Numerous solicitations for peace began to flow in, but Mir Jumla was in no mood to accept them. The viceroy marched towards Tipam enroute to Kamrup with a view to expel the Ahom king, therefrom. But he was not destined to realise his aim. The

Mir Jumla's ill-  
ness: Treaty of  
peace, 1663

stresses and strains of the campaign, the hardships and privations he had shared with the common soldiers told heavy on his health and shattered it altogether. In December, Mir Jumla fell seriously ill and the soldiers refused to advance any further. Meanwhile the Ahom king became extremely anxious for peace. At last Mir Jumla agreed to a treaty of peace which was concluded on the following terms : (1) The Ahom king and the Tipam Raja would each send a daughter to the imperial harem. (2) The Ahom king would deliver immediately a war indemnity of 20,000 tolas of gold, 120,000 tolas of silver and 40 elephants. (3) During the next twelve months, the Ahom king would deliver the balance of the indemnity. (4) He would surrender the sons of Burha Gohain and Barpatra Gohain as hostages to the Mughal viceroy. (5) All Assam west of the Bharali river on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and west of the Kalang river on the south was to be ceded to the Mughals. (6) The Ahom king was to release immediately the war-prisoners.<sup>1</sup>

The Ahom king sent on 5 January 1663, his daughter together with the first instalment of the indemnity to the imperial camp. Soon after the conclusion of peace on 10 January 1663, Mir Jumla set out on his

Death of Mir  
Jumla

<sup>1</sup> S. N. Bhattacharya, *Op. cit.*, pp. 346-47.

return march. But on 31 March he died at Khizipur, a few miles short of Dacca.

The death of Mir Jumla closes the most important and eventful chapter in the history of Mughal-Ahom politics as well as in that of Mughal north-east frontier policy. "The grandest and the most ambitious attempt of Mughal India to attain to its natural frontiers in the north-east ended." The Assam campaign was a barren enterprise. Kamrup was no doubt reconquered. But Kuch Bihar again broke away from Mughal sway and not an inch of territory was really gained by the Mughals. Mir Jumla's attempt to conquer a powerful kingdom like Assam ultimately led to a great national reaction which affected the future of Mughal Kamrup. In fact, Mughal aggression roused Ahom national feeling and two decades after the Assam campaign Kamrup was also lost to the Mughal empire.

**Mughal-Ahom relations after Mir Jumla's invasion.** The two decades that elapsed after Mir Jumla's Assam campaign marked the last phase of the Mughal north-east frontier policy. The Mughals fought strictly on the defensive and for the next twenty years made a most persistent effort to retain their hold on Kamrup against an equally determined policy of the Ahoms to expel the Mughals therefrom. The successors of the Assam king Jayadhwaj made persistent efforts to shake off the humiliating legacy of foreign subjection. He came to terms with the Kuch king and thereby strengthened his position. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Ahom state and expressed his readiness to conform to the boundary limits existing at the time of the conquest of Kamrup in 1612. But the arrogance of the Mughal faujdar of Kamrup precipitated the crisis. The Ahoms were provoked to launch an attack upon Mughal territories in 1667. The Mughals opened peace overtures. But the Ahoms rejected them. The Ahoms occupied Kamrup. This incident was destined to be the last stage in the great political conflict between the two powers. Emperor Aurangzeb engaged as he was in the life and death struggle in the Deccan, was powerless to make any more attempt to recover the lost territories in the north-east frontier during his life-time. His weak successors could not think of taking up Aurangzeb's unfinished work anew. The long-drawn conflict between the Mughals and the Ahom king ultimately ended in the triumph of the latter. What was lost to the Mughals was gained by the Ahoms. By the permanent acquisition of

Effect of  
Assam  
campaign

Kamrup, the western frontier of the Ahom kingdom was considerably pushed forward and its position greatly improved. "The victory of the Assamese over the Mughals proclaimed the ultimate triumph of nationalism and patriotism over imperialism and alien rule."<sup>1</sup>

**The net result of Mughal north-east frontier policy.** The net result of the Mughal north-east frontier policy was in its essence a barren enterprise. The desire of the Mughals to attain natural boundaries in that region was not materialised. During the second half of Aurangzeb's reign, Kamrup which was annexed to the empire in 1612, completely broke off from the Mughal sway and ultimately passed into the hands of the Ahoms. The loss in men and money which the Mughals incurred in their long-drawn struggle in the frontier was never compensated even in part. Ultimately the numerous campaigns in the frontier proved to be nothing more than plundering raids like Alexander's Indian campaigns. "Only Kuch Behar was retained in political subjection and what is worse, was gradually dismembered to swell the pampered but decadent fabric of Mughal India."<sup>2</sup> In fact the disastrous Assam campaigns broke the spell of the invincibility of Mughal arms with the tribes of the north-eastern frontier and led them to a new career of political greatness.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PORTUGUESE IN BENGAL

The Portuguese were the earliest European traders who settled in Bengal in the first half of the 16th century and enjoyed some amount of autonomy and some of their settlements in Bengal became virtually independent of the Mughal rulers, being directly subject, for a time, to the jurisdiction of the Portuguese government of Ceylon. Of course, they enjoyed autonomy on condition of paying homage to the Mughal emperor and obeying the Mughal laws and paying taxes to the Mughal government. They did not enjoy any extra-territorial rights in Bengal as the European nations used to enjoy in China in the same period. The Portuguese paved the way for the commercial ventures of the Dutch, the English and other European nations. The position that the Portuguese occupied in Bengal at the beginning of the 16th century is comparable to that of the English in the middle of the 18th century. The Portuguese had their settlements and factories not only at the principal ports of Hughli and Chittagong, but at many other places as far as at Patna and Pipli. After a few centuries, the Portuguese reopened Bengal's oceanic trade in the countries of the east and west. In the field of religion and society, the Portuguese also played a considerable part. Again, the Portuguese introduced piracy in Bengal waters which assumed dangerous proportion till the conquest of Chittagong in 1666 which broke the nest of the Magh-Feringi pirates. The Bengali literature of the contemporary period contains gruesome picture of the Feringi pirates and their atrocities. Hence the varied activities of the Portuguese in Bengal constitute an important feature of Bengal history under the Mughals.

**The advent of the Portuguese in Bengal.** For almost twenty years after Vasco da Gama anchored at Calicut on the western coast of India, the Portuguese had no definite commercial intercourse with Bengal. The Bengal merchandise were not unknown in the markets recently captured by the Portuguese. But they found their way to Malabar and Malacca in native crafts and the profit went to un-christian pockets. The Portuguese had visited Bengal in these un-christian (mainly Arabs) crafts.

long before Joao de Silveira who commanded the first official expedition to Bengal with a view to open trade and commerce with the province. But these early visitors were passing tradesmen who sold or exchanged their merchandise at the first port of Bengal they touched at and then availed themselves of any crafts to repair to their own ports or settlements.

It was Vasco da Gama who first realised the prospect of trade and commerce in Bengal. Dwelling on such prospects, he wrote to the Government of Portugal thus : "Benguala has a Moorish King and a mixed population of Christians and Moors, . . . The country could export quantities of wheat and very valuable cotton goods. Cloths which sell on the spot for 22 shillings and 6 pence fetch 90 shillings in Calicut. It abounds in silver."<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese governor of Goa, Albuquerque also from time to time wrote to King Manoel about the vast possibilities of trade and commerce in Bengal. When the Portuguese actually started their trade and commerce in Bengal, they realised to their satisfaction what a mine of wealth they had found. "Very appropriately, indeed, did the Mughals style Bengal 'the Paradise of India'."<sup>2</sup>

Acting upon the desires of Vasco da Gama and Albuquerque, King Manoel sent in 1517 Fernao Peres d'Andrade with four ships to proceed to Bengal with a definite purpose of opening trade with the province. Andreda filled his ships with chillies and other commodities, and learning that these goods would fetch a good profit in China sailed towards that country thinking of returning to Bengal at a later date. But owing to troubles on the way, he was forced to return to Malacca. On his way back from Malacca, he sent a messenger to Bengal in a Moorish ship as an advance agent to announce his arrival. This agent was Joao Coelho who arrived at Chittagong a few days earlier than Silveira.

The Governor of the Portuguese possessions in the East de Albergaria (successor of Albuquerque) sent an official mission to Bengal under the command of Joao de Silveira. This first Portuguese mission to Bengal with the purpose of opening trade with the province, however, proved a failure. The Portuguese historians have laid blame

Expedition of  
Silveira, 1517-18

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 26. Albuquerque wrote to King Manoel, "Bengal requires all our merchandise and it is in need of it."

on the "treachery and wickedness of the Bengali character" for the failure of the mission of Silveira.

Silveira had encountered two trading vessels on his way to the Maldives and made prizes of them. One of the seized vessels belonged to a Muslim merchant, Ghulam Ali, who was a relative of the governor of Chittagong. As Silveira was not at all familiar with the waters, he impressed into his service a Muslim sailor from the boats he had captured. This incident together with the arrival of Coelho at the same time gave the Muslim governor of Chittagong ample room for suspicion. Silveira, on his arrival at the port of Chittagong sent a message to the king of Bengal,<sup>1</sup> asking in the name of the King of Portugal for facilities of trade and for permission to raise a factory where the Portuguese merchants could rest during their voyages and exchange their merchandise with other traders. But Silveria's envoy was never received. He was considered to be a pirate and hence he was refused landing and unloading his goods. The traders of Chittagong were ordered not to do any business with Silveira. It will be reasonable to suppose that by that time the highhandedness of Vasco da Gama and Cabral on the Indian coasts had been reported by the merchants of western India to their friends and partners in Bengal. But Coelho was treated with kindness and courtesy as "the real messenger of the King of Portugal". Silveira, not knowing what was actually transpiring between Coelho and the government of Chittagong, was determined not to allow Coelho to arrange the trade matters "preferring to do so himself as he was the real ambassador sent by the Portuguese Governor".<sup>2</sup> However all efforts of Silveira ended in failure. Meanwhile, he was experiencing serious difficulties due to the stoppage of supplying food and provisions to his men. He found himself in an unenviable plight. He dared not leave the shores until the monsoon was over.

It is really surprising that the Portuguese captains and adventurers on the Indian coasts began their career with great highhandedness and resorted to all sorts of crimes against the people with whom they desired commercial intercourse. Probably, the Papal Bull granting the

<sup>1</sup> There is some controversy about the identity of the King of Bengal. According to the Rajmala, the Tippera King conquered Chittagong from Husain Shah of Bengal in 1512. According to O'Malley, it was a port held by the Arrakan King. Doubtless, the King of Bengal at this time was Husain Shah whose son Nasrat Shah reconquered Chittagong.

<sup>2</sup> Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, p. 29.

sovereignty of the eastern seas to the crown of Portugal was at the root of such highhandedness and provocative activities of the Portuguese captains and adventurers in the eastern seas. On the virtue of the Papal grant, the King of Portugal had assumed the title of "Lord of the Navigation, Conquests and Trade of Aethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India".<sup>1</sup> According to Portuguese way of thinking, "every Portuguese captain was not only complement, but obliged to exercise the authority that the title connoted. It never occurred to them that the Papal Bull might not possibly have any legal or moral sanction in countries outside His Holiness's spiritual jurisdiction".<sup>2</sup> The Portuguese justified their actions in the east in other ways. They thought it within their right to fight and crush the Moor or Muslim whenever they happened to come on their way. As a matter of fact, in the eastern seas, the Muslims particularly the Arabs had been enjoying since long a monopoly of trade and commerce. Hence they were the principal rivals of the Portuguese who were the fanatical Christians. To commercial rivalry was added racial hatred. The Portuguese had to wage a long and bitter war against the Moor in their native land and hence, "Portuguese patriotism and Portuguese piety equally demanded the extermination of the hated Moor in the neighbouring tracts of Africa", and southeast Asia.

To return to our story, unsuccessful and disappointed, Silveira sailed back. Although, he had achieved nothing it became an established practice since the time Silveira's expedition to Bengal, to send almost annually to Bengal Portuguese ships with merchandise with the purpose of opening trade and commerce. In  
 : Pereira, 1526      1526 the Portuguese Governor de Sampayo sent Ruy Vaz Pereira to lead an expedition to Bengal. On his way, Pereira captured and plundered a merchantman belonging to one Khwaja Shihabuddin. Campos writes : "Pereira saw in the port (Chittagong) a galleot belonging to one Khajeh Shibah-uddin, a rich Persian merchant, built after the Portuguese fashion in order to plunder merchant ships and ascribe the crime to the Portuguese."<sup>3</sup>

In 1528 an expedition commanded by Martin Affonso de Mello landed by a curious chance on the coast of Bengal. De Mello had a

<sup>1</sup> Danvers, *The Portuguese in India*, Vol. I, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

fort in Sunda where he had gone with eight ships and four hundred men. He was cruising off Ceylon when a violent storm scattered his fleet and drove his boat to a sandy bank near the island of Neganale opposite Arrakan. He was in a miserable plight and he and his men suffered the extremes of hunger and thirst. Some fishermen came to his rescue and offered to guide him and his party to Chittagong. But they played him false and took him to Chakaria (50 miles from Chakaria) which was under a local Chieftain Khuda Baksh. The latter imprisoned the Portuguese visitors at once. According to the Portuguese accounts, Khuda Baksh offered de Mello and his party liberty and leave to go to their destinations provided they helped him in his feud he had with an unfriendly neighbour. They won for him the victory but Khuda Baksh far from keeping his pledge, imprisoned them again. Meanwhile two of de Mello's lieutenants arrived at Chakaria and tried to ransom Affonso with all the goods they had brought in their ships, but Khuda Baksh demanded more. As a last resort, Affonso de Mello made an unsuccessful attempt to escape. It resulted in greater rigours and de Mello's nephew was brutally sacrificed by the local Brahmins. At last, Khwaja Shihabuddin came to the rescue of de Mello and his party. He referred the matter of the capture of his boat to Nuno da Cunah, the Portuguese governor, and promised to ransom de Mello provided he got back his vessel. Accordingly, his vessel with all its goods was restored to him and he ransomed de Mello in 1529 at the price of £1,500. De Mello was sent back to Goa after two years of misery and misfortune.<sup>1</sup>

Shihabuddin became a great friend of the Portuguese and with their assistance, he tried to free himself from some troubles he had got into with Nasrat Shah, the Sultan of Bengal and to escape to Ormuz in a Portuguese vessel. In return for the help, Shihabuddin offered to use his influence with the court of Bengal to secure facilities for Portuguese trade as well as a licence for building forts and factories at Chittagong. Nuno da Cunah readily agreed to send another trading and diplomatic mission to Bengal. Affonso de Mello was chosen for the purpose. Mello landed in Bengal in 1533 with five ships and two hundred men for the second time. One ship was a government property, the four being the property of private captains. All the

Second expedition of de Mello, 1533

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, pp. 31-33.



cargo belonged to joint stock companies. The object of this mission was not only to help Khwaja Shihabuddin but also through his influence to open trade and commerce with Bengal as well as to secure a suitable site for a factory. This time, the governor of Chittagong received de Mello well and he was allowed to unload his cargo. But de Mello betrayed the confidence again and instead of winning over the sympathy and confidence of the local authorities by fair dealings, he alienated them by resorting to smuggling with a view to avoid paying the custom duties levied at the port. Moreover, he incurred the displeasure of the Sultan of Bengal, Mahmud Shah, by offering him some stolen goods as presents. His envoy Duarte de Azevedo carried along with other kind of presents some boxes of rose water which were plundered from a Muslim ship. The presentation of stolen goods highly provoked the Sultan of Bengal and he decided to put to the sword not only the envoy Azevedo but all the Portuguese that came along with Mello. A Muslim saint interceded in their favour dissuading the Sultan from murder. The Sultan was, however, determined to imprison them and instructed the governor of Chittagong to seize de Mello and his men. The governor instead of arresting them in a straightforward way, invited them to a banquet. Affonso de Mello and forty other Portuguese suspecting no treachery accepted the invitation. No sooner the unsuspecting guests assembled at the dinner table than a number of Muslims came with guns and bows and arrows and began to hurl them against the guests. The Portuguese offered a desperate defence. But unable to hold, they eventually surrendered. Some of those who were on the shore were also killed and property valued at £100,000 was seized. In all ten Portuguese were killed. Affonso de Mello himself was wounded. Thirty Portuguese who survived were tied up and thrown into a dark-room. A few days later, the prisoners were sent to Gaur where "they were treated not like men but like beasts".<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese envoy Azevedo and his twelve associates who had been in the Bengal capital were similarly confined in "what de Barros calls a hell (inferno)."<sup>2</sup>

The insult and maltreatment to the Portuguese in Bengal highly incensed Nuno da Cunha and he swore revenge. He immediately fitted out a fleet of nine sail manned by 350 Portuguese and sent it under the command of Antonio da Silva Menezes to demand a satisfactory explanation from the Sultan of Bengal for such maltreatment

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<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

to the Portuguese ambassador and to obtain the release of Affonso de Mello and his men by peaceful means and by force if necessary.

As soon as Menezes arrived at Chittagong in 1534, he sent an envoy to Sultan Mahmud Shah with the message of the Portuguese governor and "with the threat that if any harm done to him or if he were not allowed to return within a month, war would be declared against him".<sup>1</sup> The Sultan instead of setting free the Portuguese prisoners, wrote a letter to Menezes requesting him to supply him a number of Portuguese carpenters, jewellers and other workmen. Meanwhile one month had elapsed. On non-receipt of reply from the Sultan of Bengal, Menezes set fire to a great part of Chittagong and captured and put to sword a large number of the Sultan's people. There is another version which differs a little from the foregoing account of de Barros which relates that Mahmud Shah demanded £15,000 as ransom for de Mello and his party "which being too exorbitant, Menezes decided upon bombarding Chittagong".<sup>2</sup>

The Portuguese envoy who was sent to the court of Mahmud Shah with the letter of Menezes departed from Gaur only three days before Menezes resorted to atrocities in Chittagong. The

Release of Mello: Mahmud Shah's appeal to Portuguese Governor for help

fate of de Mello and his people became almost sealed. But circumstances soon became favourable to the Portuguese prisoners. Bengal was soon to become a theatre of war due to the antagonism between

Mahmud Shah and his rival Sher Shah in which de Mello was destined to play an important role. While the Mughal emperor Humayun was pre-occupied with Gujarat campaigns, Sher Shah advanced against Bengal with a view to seize the province for himself. Under the circumstances, Mahmud Shah of Bengal was compelled to implore the help of the Portuguese prisoners. Hence he released his prisoners and Affonso de Mello suddenly found himself in the honoured position of a military adviser of the Sultan of Bengal. He sought advice from de Mello as to the plan of defence against Sher Shah's aggression and decided to send an envoy to Nuno da Cunah seeking his assistance.

At this critical juncture, there arrived at Satgaon a Portuguese captain Diogo Rebello with instructions from Nuno da Cunah to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, *Op. cit.*, p. 36, Foot-note.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36, Foot-note.

secure the release of de Mello and his men. Rebello practically blockaded the port of Satgaon and forbade the entry of any ship therein. Dwelling on this episode, Campos writes :  
 Agreement between Mahmud Shah and Portuguese, 1536  
 "This illustrates the policy which the Portuguese had adopted in order to destroy the Arab commerce, claiming for themselves alone, the right of trading in the Indian seas."<sup>1</sup> Rebello sent a message to the Sultan of Bengal to liberate the Portuguese prisoners immediately. This was the first occasion when a Portuguese captain sailed up to Gaur by the river Hughli. Mahmud Shah, as has been noted earlier, in his anxiety to secure the assistance of the Portuguese against Sher Shah, tried to propitiate the Portuguese captain by ordering the governor of Satgaon to receive Rebello with all respects. Mahmud Shah in return for Portuguese help, promised to grant them land to erect their factories as well as permission to build fortresses in Chittagong and Satgaon. This was the first agreement that the Portuguese had concluded with the ruler of Bengal. The Bengal Sultan set free twenty-two Portuguese prisoners and sent them back to Rebello but excused himself for not sending back Affonso de Mello as he required his advice most of all. In the meantime Sher Shah marched upon Bengal. To defend the passes of Teliagarhi and Sakrigali, troops were despatched in two Portuguese ships, one under the command of Joao de Villalobos and the other under that of Joao Correa. The Portuguese are said to have performed wonders of valour. But neither bravery nor skill could influence the course of events and Mahmud Shah had to purchase peace by offering a large indemnity and costly presents to Sher Shah. Although Mahmud Shah could not achieve victory, he recognised the services of the Portuguese. He made a handsome presents to Affonso de Mello and his men. Besides he allowed the Portuguese to build their custom houses and factories at Chittagong and Satgaon. He appointed Nuno Fernandez Freire, the chief of the custom house of Chittagong, and allowed him to collect rent from the Hindus and Muslims living there. The custom house of Satgaon was given to Joao Correa. This was the first establishment of the Portuguese in Bengal. But Mahmud Shah did not get the help he desired from the Portuguese governor. Affonso de Britto who visited the capital of Bengal in 1538 brought the disappointing news that because of the preoccupations of the Portuguese in Gujarat, it was not

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<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

at all possible for them to render any more service to the Sultan of Bengal. However, Mahmud Shah highly grateful as he was to Affonso de Mello for the valuable assistance, permitted the latter to leave Bengal with his men. He retained only five Portuguese including Affonso Vaz de Britto as hostages for the promised help in the future. As soon as Affonso de Mello left Bengal, Sher Shah again marched against Mahmud Shah and the latter was chased out of Gaur and died of his wound in 1538. The help which Nuno da Cunah had promised Mahmud Shah did come indeed, but it was too late. The expedition was commanded by Peres de Sampayo. He reached Chittagong when Sher Shah was already in possession of Bengal. A dispute soon arose between the generals of Sher Shah and Mahmud Shah over the issue of Chittagong. On behalf of Amirza Khan, a general of Mahmud Shah, Sampayo tried to conquer the town of Chittagong. After an armed skirmish with some Moors, Sampayo left for Pegu where he died. With his passing away ends the first phase in the history of the Portuguese adventures in Bengal. "Any way, Martin Affonso de Mello's sufferings had not been in vain. The Portuguese had obtained from Mahmud Shah a vast establishment and a custom house in Chittagong and a smaller one in Satgaon."<sup>1</sup>

**The second phase of the Portuguese settlement.** For the next twenty years since 1538, the Portuguese did not remain idle and their restless spirit knew no respite. They continued to visit the different ports of Bengal in their trading vessels and resorted to filibustering activities. The year 1559 is another landmark in the history of the Portuguese infiltration in Bengal. In their desire to divert the trade of Chittagong to another port in Bengal, as they were not pulling on well with the rulers of Chittagong, the Portuguese concluded an agreement of trade and commerce with Raja Paramananda Ray of Bakla (Bakherganj). This agreement was signed by Niamat Khan and Gunu Biswas on behalf of Raja Paramananda. According to the terms of this treaty of 30 April 1539, (1) the port of Bakla was thrown open to Portuguese trade, (2) the prince of Bakla was to treat the Portuguese traders who might visit his domain with kindness and consideration, to provide the visiting Portuguese fleet with cargo and to refrain from realising custom duties from the visiting Portuguese tradesmen, (3) the Portuguese in consideration of the above provisions, agreed to divert their trade from Chittagong to Bakla, to pay the lawful

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

custom duties to the prince and to grant licence to four ships of the prince to carry merchandise to the Portuguese-held ports of Goa, Ormuz and Malacca every year and (4) the prince of Bakla agreed to pay an annual tribute in a specified quantity of rice, sugar, butter and cotton to the Portuguese in return for military assistance to him against his unfriendly neighbours. "This treaty obviously placed the Raja

in a subordinate position. While he was precluded from dealing with their enemies in any way, the Portuguese retained the right of concluding similar treaties with other ruling princes of this region."<sup>1</sup>

This treaty, therefore, bore both commercial and political importance to the Portuguese in their history of infiltration in Bengal and it was the foundation stone of their power in Bengal. Obviously, the Portuguese aimed at securing trade-monopoly of Bengal through the agency of the local princes, "whose weakness and ambition readily lent them to the new plan". In fact, for commercial and political purposes, some of the leading Bengali princes courted the friendship of the Portuguese traders and adventurers and impressed them into their service following the example of Raja Paramananda. Mention may be made of Raja Kedar Rai of Sripur and Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore. However, the desire with which the Portuguese concluded the treaty of 1559 was never realised to their expectation. Because the port of Bakla could never rob Chittagong of its commercial importance. But they never repented for the alliance of 1559. Because in the darkest days of their career in Bengal, Raja Paramananda and his successors never betrayed them.

The farman of Akbar granted to the Portuguese in 1579 marked an important stage in the development of Portuguese settlement in Bengal. They were permitted to settle down in Hughli. As has been said before, the Portuguese built their factory and custom house at Satgaon as early as 1538-39 on the strength of the farman of Sultan Mahmud Shah. Satgaon was a principal port of Bengal for ocean-going ships in the middle ages. It was a great port and flourishing city "whose antiquity extended beyond the times of Ptolemy". But Satgaon's prosperity was short-lived and its trade dwindled as the stream Saraswati diminished. Hence the Portuguese looked out for another port and it was the neighbouring port

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 358.

of Hughli that attracted their attention. As to the origin of the port of Hughli there is a difference of opinion among

the Portuguese and Muslim historians. Without going into details it will suffice to say that sometimes before Akbar's farman for a settlement in Hughli was obtained, the Portuguese were already in possession of it where the Portuguese ships used to sell their cargo of salt brought from Hijli and which they used to evacuate when the transaction was over. "Until that time", (i.e. till Akbar's farman was obtained in 1579) writes H. Hosten, "they had not been allowed when coming up the river to do more than build godowns in bamboo and thatch which were burnt down regularly every year when they returned to Goa."<sup>1</sup> Caesar Frederick, a Portuguese traveller, whose account also corroborates that of Hosten, observes : "A good tide rowing before you come to Satgaon, you shall have a place which is called Battor (near Calcutta) from thence upwards the ships do not go because that upwards the river (Saraswati) is very shallow. Every year at Battor they make and unmake a village with houses and shops made of straw and with all things necessary to their uses and this village standeth as long as the ships ride there and till they depart from the Indies and when they are departed, every man goeth to his plot of house and there setteth fire. . . ."<sup>2</sup> There is another account given by Abdul Hamid Lahori thus : "During the rule of the Bengali (Sultans) a body of Feringhi traders, inhabitants of Sondwip, used to visit Satgaon and populated a place on the bank of the Creek one Kos beyond Satgaon for themselves ; here they built some mansions with the permission of the Bengali (Sultans) on the plea of a house being necessary for their buying and selling. In the course of time, owing to the stupidity and carelessness of the rulers, many Feringis assembled here and built extremely lofty and strong mansions and strengthened them with cannon, muskets and other armaments. In a short time, a large town grew up here and it got the name Hughli Bandar."<sup>3</sup> This passage of Abdul Lahori contains certain facts which do not seem to be correct. For instance, the port of Hughli is situated not beyond but below Satgaon. Secondly, the existence of a Portuguese fort in Hughli has been misrepresented. No reference to it is to be found in the Portuguese records. Hosten denies its existence. Ralph

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, Elliot, *History of India*, etc., VII, pp. 31-32 ; Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

Fitch who visited Hughli as late as 1686 makes no mention of any Portuguese fort in Hughli. Further, at the time of its siege by Shah Jahan in 1632, no mention is found either in the Muslim or Portuguese chronicles of the existence of their fort there and Manrique and Cabral in their description of the siege have regretted that the Portuguese could not well defend themselves as they possessed no fort and they had to content themselves with "raising embankments and barricades and converting their houses into citadels".

It will, therefore, be clear from the foregoing observations that the Portuguese had some sort of a settlement in or above Satgaon and they definitely settled in the town of Hughli after Portuguese colony 1579 on the strength of a farman granted to them of Hughli, 1579 by emperor Akbar. The Mughal emperor, being satisfied with the commercial activities of the Portuguese, especially the precious goods they used to bring to Bengal from the countries of South-east Asia, invited Portuguese agents to his court. Accordingly in May 1578, Pedro Tavares, the chief of the Portuguese at Hughli visited the Mughal court and pleased the emperor so much by his intellectual talk and polished manners that the emperor granted the Portuguese full religious liberty with permission to preach their gospel and build churches. The Mughal officers were instructed to assist them with all materials necessary for constructing their residential houses. Thus the result of this mission was the establishment of the Portuguese colony of Hughli in 1579, two miles east of Satgaon. Pedro Tavares was the first Portuguese governor of Hughli. Tavares on returning to Hughli in 1579 or 1580 chose a favourable site in Hughli, established the settlement which grew into the greatest centre of trade in Bengal and supplanted the historic glory of Satgaon.<sup>1</sup>

The Portuguese settlement in Hughli flourished with amazing rapidity. In course of a short time it rose to be "the richest, the most flourishing and the most populous" of all ports that the Portuguese possessed in Bengal. The Portuguese influence was so well established in Hughli that the Mughal faujdar of Satgaon, being defeated by the king of Orissa, sought the protection of the Portuguese governor of Hughli. Since the establishment of the settlement in Hughli, Portuguese population continued to increase rapidly. In 1559 the Augustinians built their great convent at Bandel "which still

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<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

exists though not as originally built and not even on the original site”<sup>1</sup>

**Portuguese settlements in Eastern Bengal.** Along with the rapid growth of the Portuguese settlement in Hughli there was a rapid growth of their settlements in eastern Bengal. The Portuguese first appeared in Chittagong and after many vicissitudes of fortune since 1517, they secured a permission from Mahmud Shah, the Sultan of Bengal, to build their factory and a custom house at Chittagong in 1538.

Chittagong was the ‘Porto Grande’ (great port) of the Portuguese in Bengal. Unlike their settlement in

Satgaon, the ‘Porto pequeno’ (little port), the settlement of Chittagong grew into a flourishing centre of trade. Nuno Fernandez, who was appointed chief of the custom-house exercised great power and influence in Chittagong. Till the reign of emperor Aurangzeb, Mughal authority was not extended to Chittagong and it was in the possession of the king of Arrakan. About 1590 the Portuguese came into a clash with the Arrakan king and occupied the fort of Chittagong and made the island of Sondwip tributary to it. However upon a reconciliation, the Arrakan king permitted the Portuguese to build other forts in his kingdom. But the Portuguese found it unnecessary and difficult at the same time to build and maintain fortresses in Chittagong.

As told before, about 1590 one Portuguese adventurer Antonio de Souza seized the island of Sondwip which was at a distance of only six hours’ sail from Chittagong. But it did not come completely in their possession until 1602 when Carvalho captured it from the Mughals who had deprived Kedar Rai of Sripur from its possession. The capture of Sondwip was a part of their plan to shift their headquarters from Chittagong to a more safer place as the policy of the Arrakan king seemed to be uncertain to them. After the occupation of Sondwip, the local inhabitants rose into rebellion. At this juncture, Carvalho invited Manoel de Mettos, a Portuguese captain of Dianga to his help and they both succeeded in subduing local opposition and setting up their joint rule. The king of Arrakan who had many Portuguese in his kingdom got highly enraged at their seizure of Sondwip. Apprehending that they might pose a great challenge to his authority and endanger his kingdom, the king of Arrakan sent a fleet against them well equipped with guns and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.



cannon. Raja Kedar Rai also joined the Arrakan king and sent his fleet from Sripur. The Portuguese of Dianga having got scent of the impending expedition took to their ships and sailed off with their belongings as they found it impossible to withstand the combined attack by the Arrakan king and Raja Kedar Rai. On 8 November 1602, the Arrakan fleet appeared in the port of Dianga. In the fighting that followed, many Arrakanese were slain. However, the Arrakanese seized four Portuguese vessels and "in honour of their victory they drank and feasted in the wildest joy".<sup>1</sup> Two days after Carvalho and de Mello came with a relieving force from Sondwip and made an assault upon Dainga. A large number of Arrakanese were slain and about 150 ships fell into the hands of the Portuguese. Some Arrakanese escaped by jumping into the sea and swimming across to land. The Portuguese victory at Dianga caused a great panic among the Muslim inhabitants of Chittagong and a large number of them took to flight. But the Portuguese did not follow up their victory although they could have easily taken possession of the fort of Chittagong as there was none strong enough to defend it.

The king of Arrakan took serious vengeance upon the Portuguese in his kingdom. He sacked their houses and subjected them irrespective of age and sex to severe cruelties. Even the Portuguese missionaries were not spared. However a reconciliation shortly took place and a treaty was accordingly concluded whereby the Arrakan king agreed to rebuild at his own expense the church and the residence of the missionaries.

The Portuguese, henceforth, grew powerful and formed a grand project of holding the whole of eastern Bengal with Chittagong and Pegu as bases. The king of Arrakan apprehending further troubles from the Portuguese, decided to attack Sondwip a second time and accordingly sent a large fleet against Carvalho. But again fortune smiled on the Portuguese and Carvalho with only 16 vessels routed the Arrakan fleet and put to sword 2000 Arrakanese. Although Carvalho gained victory, he thought it impossible to retain his hold on Sondwip against the repeated attacks of the Arrakanese. Hence he evacuated Sondwip with his followers and belongings. The Portuguese came to Bakla and Sripur whereupon the Arrakan king took

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

possession of Sondwip. Carvalho was impressed into the service Raja Kedar Rai whom the former served with all devotion. It was Carvalho who saved Sripur against the attack of the Mughals under Mandarai. But soon Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore treacherously killed Carvalho with a view to propitiate the king of Arrakan. This brought to a close the romantic career of Carvalho.

**Some minor settlements of the Portuguese.** Since the establishment of the Portuguese settlement of Hughli, a period of rapid expansion followed in course of which the Portuguese extended their commercial activities to many important trading centres of Bengal and Orissa such as Dacca, Tamluk, Pipli, Balasore and Hijli, Bhulua and Bakla.

Since Islam Khan made Dacca, the capital of Bengal in 1608, she commanded an extensive trade which attracted many foreign merchants.

Dacca Her muslin and other kind of textiles found their way to Portugal, Italy, Malacca and Goa in the Portuguese vessels. In the time of Shaista Khan, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, a large number of Portuguese pirates popularly known as Feringis settled in Dacca and thereby a Portuguese colony sprang up there.

The Portuguese settlement in Hijli can be said to be the earliest European settlement in Bengal. In 1514, they migrated from Pipli in Orissa to Hijli. Ralph Fitch writes in 1586: Hijli "To this haven of Angeli (Hijli) come every year many ships out of Negapatam, Sumatra, Malacca and diverse other places. . . ." The Portuguese and their accomplices the Arrakanese, committed almost frequent depredations in Hijli which provoked emperor Shah Jahan to annex it to Bengal.

Tamluk in Midnapore district was another Portuguese settlement. It was in their possession for a long time even after their expulsion from Hijli. In 1635 a church was built there through Tamluk Manrique's influence. Like Pipli, Tamluk was a great slave market where the Portuguese and the Arrakanese pirates used to bring their captives for sale.

Like Tamluk and Balasore, Pipli was another slave market where the Portuguese pirates used to sell their captives. It was Pipli the earliest Portuguese settlement in the Bay of Bengal. For a long time, Pipli continued to be a trading centre of the Portuguese. Burton refers in 1683 to this

port as a "port town of the Portuguese where the Portugals are resident".

The Portuguese also had a small settlement in Balasore.  
 Balasore There is still a relic of a small Roman Catholic chapel with a wooden cross.

In Bhulua, in the district of Noakhali, there was another Portuguese settlement. The Portuguese converted a large number of the inhabitants of Bhulua into Christianity. "The Portuguese influence was completely established in Bhulua that many of the people spoke Portuguese."<sup>1</sup>

During the reign of Raja Ramchandra of Bakla, son-in-law of Raja Pratapaditya, a Portuguese mission under Melchoir da Fonseca first visited Bakla. The intelligence and manners of Fonseca impressed Raja Ramchandra so much that he allowed the Portuguese to build their church in his kingdom and to preach their gospel undisturbed. It was this friendship for the Portuguese that brought upon the Raja of Bakla the wrath of the Arrakan king.

**Growth and pattern of Portuguese trade in Bengal.** Campos writes : "The high hopes which the Portuguese had entertained regarding the possibilities of trade in Bengal were realised beyond their expectations."<sup>2</sup> They were the pioneer European traders to open Bengal to European trade and commerce and hence they contributed much to Bengal's economic prosperity for some time. From their settlement in Pipli the Portuguese within a space of fifty years carried their trading activities to the remotest parts of the province and thereby gave a great impetus to the growth of Bengal's produces. Towards the middle of the 16th century a great part of Bengal trade and commerce passed silently into the hands of the Portuguese. They came to this country in quest of commerce and christians. Their evangelical zeal met with a setback, no doubt, but their acquisitive instincts were more than gratified in the rich and prosperous marts of Bengal. Between 1575 and 1627, the Portuguese trade was perhaps the most remarkable feature in the development of Bengal's economy. From the time of their very appearance in Bengal, they gained complete mastery over the waterways of the province. As early as 1535 Diogo Rebello,

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

the Portuguese captain who was asked by their governor Nuna da Cunah to secure the release of de Mello and his party from their captivity, completely blockaded the port of Satgaon and forbade any alien ship to anchor at that port without the permission of the Portuguese. Even before they secured official permission to settle in Bengal as peaceful traders, they exercised their prowess on the Indian seas and rivers by plundering and capturing trading vessels of the Indian merchants. In the field of over-sea trade, they, in fact, had no serious rivals in Bengal till the advent of other European nations like the Dutch and the English. In the beginning, the Portuguese ships with cargo used to come to Bengal before the monsoons set in and spend the rainy months buying and selling goods. After the monsoons, they used to go back to Goa and other Portuguese ports laden with the merchandise of Bengal.

The earliest commercial relations of the Portuguese in Bengal were with Chittagong. De Barros refers to Chittagong in 1532 "as the most famous and wealthy city of the kingdom of Bengal on account of its port at which meets the traffic of all that eastern region". From 1517 began regular Portuguese expeditions to Chittagong till they secured permission to establish factory and custom houses in Chittagong and Satgaon in 1537. Cesar Federici, the Venetian merchant who visited these ports in 1567 gives us an idea about the nature of the Portuguese trade. In 1567 the aforesaid merchant found more than eighteen ships anchored in Chittagong and traders from this port used to carry to the Indies "great store of rice, very great quantities of bombast cloth of every sort, sugar, corn and money with other merchandise". In West Bengal, Satgaon was the great emporium of Portuguese trade since 1537. At that time it was the principal mart where the merchants and traders of upper India flocked with their goods. At Satgaon every year "they laid thirtie or five and thirtie ships great and small with rice, cloth of bombast of diverse sorts, lacca, great abundance of sugar, mirabolans dried and preserved, long pepper, oyle of zezeline and many other sorts of merchandise". But the prosperity of Satgaon was shortlived and it dwindled into insignificance as the river Saraswati diminished. Hughli was then turned into 'Porto Pequeno' of the Portuguese. Cesar Federici who was in Hughli in 1567 writes that every year the Portuguese ships sailed up the Ganges, the bigger ones being laden at Betor (near Sibpore) and small ones sailed up to Satgaon. In Betor, the Portuguese

Earliest commercial relations

stored their goods in thatched houses and either sold or exchanged them in big local markets. Gradually these goods swelled the markets of Calcutta and Chitpore which were then very insignificant villages. Wilson writes, "it is under their (Portuguese) commercial supremacy that the place which we know by the name of Calcutta first began to have any importance; it is to them that we are chiefly indebted for first reliable information about Hughli and its markets".<sup>1</sup> Chittagong still continued to be the 'Porto Grande' of the Portuguese. From Chittagong, they purchased large quantities of rice, bombast cloth, sugar and corn. The East Indies were the destination of these goods of Bengal.

The foundation of Hughli ushered in a new epoch in the commercial activities of the Portuguese in Bengal. In course of time the Portuguese

settlement of Hughli became the richest and most prosperous trading centre of Bengal. The Portuguese started their settlement as a merely temporary resort with a number of store-houses set up by the Portuguese

traders who came from different parts of Bengal to buy and sell. At the beginning, they used to spend the winter months but later they began to stay one or two years at a stretch "seeing the advantage of this trade". The Portuguese traders used to advance a large sum of money to the local merchants at the time of their departure from Hughli for the purchase of various commodities which they used to collect on their return next year. After the farman of Akbar was obtained, the Portuguese began to stay in Hughli permanently. Manrique has given a detailed account<sup>2</sup> of the Portuguese trade. They imported into Bengal various kinds of merchandise from other places.

The principal goods they brought to Bengal were from Malacca, Sumatra, and Borneo such as "brocades, brocadeles, cloth, velvets, damasks, satins, taffetas, tafiosinas, taffisiras, escomillas or muslins". From Ceylon they imported cinammon and pepper. They imported silk, gilt furniture such as bed-steads, tables, coffers, chests, wooden boxes from China. Also they used to bring valuable pearls and jewels from China. From Maldives they imported sea-shells. Bigger kind of shells were brought from the Coromandel coast. From Solor and Timor, they imported red and white sandal wood which fetched high prices in Bengal.

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*.

<sup>2</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

Bengal's export trade during the period between 1538 and 1630, was largely in Portuguese hands though the Indian traders played second fiddle as middlemen. The Portuguese exported various merchandise from Bengal as it was a centre of many industries and manufactures.

Portuguese exports

Pyrard da Laval who visited Bengal in the early years of the 17th century, writes : "The inhabitants (of Bengal) both men and women, are wonderously adroit in all such manufactures, such as of cotton, cloth and silks and in needlework, such as embroideries which are worked so skilfully, down to the smallest stitches that nothing prettier is to be seen anywhere."<sup>1</sup> The natural products of Bengal were also abundant. Manrique says that rice, butter, oil and wax were annually laden in ships in the ports of Bengal. The Portuguese themselves used to prepare in Hughli all sorts of sweetmeats from mangoes, oranges, lemons, etc. and also pickles of various kinds which they used to export from Bengal. They took full advantage of the cheapness of the goods in Bengal and sold them at an enormous profit in their markets in the East Indies. The wealth that such commerce brought to the Portuguese is unimaginable. The Portuguese had found the trade of Bengal so profitable that even in the latter half of the 18th century the government at Lisbon attempted to form a company exclusively to trade with Bengal. Of course, this plan was never realised.

After the foundation of their settlement in Hughli, there followed a rapid expansion of their trade to all the important trading centres of Bengal including Dacca. They brought various manufactured goods to their ports in Bengal from ports of Asia by ships. Like the Portuguese those who came from other parts of Asia to sell their goods purchased from elsewhere used to take back Bengal goods for sale all over Asia. The Portuguese of Bengal also visited Burma, the Indies and sold Bengal goods and in turn brought the goods of those countries to Bengal. Thus the Portuguese, from their principal trading centre in Bengal, carried on a vast export and import trade with the neighbouring countries. They practically monopolised the Hughli and other riverways of Bengal. In their letter of 22 February 1616, the English factors at Surat wrote to the East Indian Company thus, "that hitherto they had not found it practicable to open trade in the countries bordering on the Ganges, the Portuguese

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 117.

being in exclusive possession of the commerce in this part of the peninsula".<sup>1</sup>

As they were the first to open the doors of Bengal to European trade and commerce, naturally they exercised a manifold control on Bengal's oversea trade. They controlled both her import and export trade in two ways. First'y, the important trading centres like Hughli, Satgaon and Chittagong as well as the lesser centres like Hijli, Tamruk and the like were completely under their control<sup>2</sup> where they had exclusive control over the entrance and exist of all ships. The command over the Bay of Bengal and other waterways of Bengal and possession of well-built vessels enabled them in directing their sea-borne trade to their various trading centres in Bengal. The second method was destruction of such foreign vessels as might throw a challenge to their monopoly control. The Portuguese applied to Bengal the law they had enforced in the Indian seas in order to destroy the trade of the Arabs. Any ship that sailed without a Portuguese pass was treated as an enemy ship and was either not allowed to sail or captured. "The superiority of Portuguese vessels over native craft rendered the enforcement of this principle practicable." However, it would be wrong to suppose that the Portuguese did not allow the merchants and traders of other nationalities to take part in Bengal's trade and commerce. In the internal and overland trade of Bengal, merchants of upper India and the Asian countries continued to play an important part without any serious opposition from the Portuguese. The merchants from upper India, Persia and Central Asia flocked to the Portuguese settlements to purchase Portuguese-imported as well as indigenous goods. European traders who regularly visited Portuguese India, also sailed down to Bengal in Portuguese ships and on their return voyage carried away Bengal products. So it is evident that although the Portuguese enjoyed some degree of monopoly over Bengal's export and import trade, they never or rather were unable to close the doors of Bengal to the foreigners. For certain reasons, they could not completely deny other merchants and traders to take part in Bengal's trade. The Portuguese were superior in naval strength, no doubt, but they were not strong enough to destroy all their rivals

Portuguese  
monopoly how  
maintained

Limitation to  
their monopoly

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> "For small shipping there were no ports but such as the Portuguese possessed"—  
A letter of 1618 from the Surat factors to E. I. Co. vide, Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

particularly in the earlier part of their trading career.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, they had to tolerate the local traders to some extent in their own interests. For the purpose of purchasing local produce and manufactured goods as well as for disposing of their imported merchandise, they had to take the local traders into confidence and with whom they entered into some sort of commercial alliance. Possibly the system of permits introduced by the Portuguese in India's western waters was also in vogue in the eastern waters. The treaty concluded between Raja Paramananda of Bakla and the Portuguese in 1559 refers to this fact. In the early years of Shah Jahan's reign, Manrique found at Pipli in Orissa a big vessel belonging to a Mughal officer being sent to Cochin with cargo under the command of a Portuguese captain. After Jahangir's reign, European manufacturers like the Dutch, the English and the Danes might have found their way to Bengal in Portuguese vessels. And on their return voyage they used to carry as their cargo mainly the Bengal textile, silks and various food-stuffs.

Although the Portuguese enjoyed some sort of monopoly over Bengal's oversea trade, in the internal and overland trade of Bengal, merchants of India and the Asian countries, doubtless, played an important part without any serious opposition from the Portuguese. These merchants flocked to the various Portuguese settlements to buy the local as well as imported merchandise.<sup>2</sup>

The political condition of the province at the turn of the 16th century, the naval superiority of the Portuguese and the patronage extended to the Portuguese by the local chiefs of Bengal, no doubt, contributed much to the growth of the Portuguese trade both inland and oversea. They did much in popularising the Bengal products—manufactured and food-stuffs in the south eastern Asian countries. They did much in reviving some of the cottage industries of Bengal and they contributed to the rise of Bengal's 'dadni' merchants who acted as a sort of middlemen between the Portuguese buyers and the Bengali producers and manufacturers. They introduced in Bengal a new kind of sweetmeat industry. The sweetmeats prepared from mangoes, oranges, lemons, ginger, ringroots, etc. were both palatable and cheap. The Portuguese gave an impetus to the cultivation of various kinds of fruits. The Portuguese trade and commerce aug-

Portuguese  
contributions

<sup>1</sup> T. Roychowdhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.



mented the state revenue in the form of custom duties. As early as 1597 the 'sair' duties from Satgaon alone were estimated at 1,200,000 'dams' or Rs. 30,000, obviously an outcome of the flourishing Portuguese trade. "This was a record with which the other trading communities had nothing to compare." Further, the Portuguese opened the various water-routes of Bengal to trade and commerce and gave Hijli, Chittagong, Sondwip and Sripur, hitherto less significant from the commercial point of view, a new importance. Dacca also owed its importance to the trading activities of the Portuguese. Doubtless, the Portuguese chalked out the path which was followed in future by the Dutch and the English. Acknowledging the indebtedness of the English to the Portuguese, Wilson wrote thus : "It is under their (Portuguese) commercial supremacy that the place which we know by the name of Calcutta first began to have any importance; it is to them that we are chiefly indebted for our first reliable information about Hughli and its markets."

From the beginning of the 17th century, the Portuguese trade began to dwindle. By the time the Portuguese trade was firmly established in the Bengal, the general decline in their power all over Asia had already set in. The Dutch had appeared in the Indian seas as a formidable rival and the English were soon to follow. Within Bengal, adverse political situation added to their misfortune. In 1607, the Arrakan king massacred their settlement at Dianga. In 1616 Gonzales's short-lived reign in Sondwip was brought to an end by the Arrakanese. In 1632 Hughli fell before the Mughal army. The fall of Hughli marked the end of their commercial supremacy in Bengal. Their subsequent activities were of little significance in the larger life of the country.

### *The Downfall of the Portuguese in Bengal*

With the dawn of the 17th century, the Portuguese power in the East began to decline. After extending her commercial and political influence both in the western and eastern hemisphere, Portugal herself became exhausted and began to show signs of utter weakness and impotency. The task the Portuguese undertook to accomplish was too heavy for a small nation like Portugal. The decline and fall of the Portuguese power in Bengal was due to certain factors—external and internal.

The decline of the Portuguese power in the West had its repercussions on their fortune in the East. The union of the Crown of Spain and Portugal in 1580 under Philip II of Spain sealed the fate of Portugal. The Spanish king had no sympathy with Portugal and treated her as a conquered country. "A nation fettered with the bonds of captivity and slavery could no longer rule the world." Till the end of the 16th century, the Portuguese possessed two ports of note in the Low countries like Antwerp and Amsterdam. By 1594, the Flemish and the Dutch having broken ties with Spain, Philip II closed all the Portuguese ports against the Dutch. Being deprived of the eastern commodities by this closure, the Dutch turned their attention to the Indies and thus came into a stiff rivalry with the Portuguese in Western and Eastern India. Thus Portugal had to pay "dearly for Philip's crime by the loss of an Empire".<sup>1</sup>

The Dutch wrested a great part of the Portuguese trade in the Indies, carried on struggle for a long time and at last emerged victorious. It was not that the Dutch were bolder and more energetic than the Portuguese. The fact was that, the Dutch, free from foreign domination, found the Portuguese demoralised and groaning under the yoke of the Spanish monarchy. In course of a few years, the Dutch seized a good many of the Portuguese ports and markets in the East.

The Portuguese had to face another serious rival in the Eastern seas—the English, who followed in the wake of the Dutch. Severe rivalries and hostilities arose between them and the Portuguese. At length, the English and the Dutch made a combined cause against the Portuguese. At the outset, the Portuguese, having had tremendous influence in the native courts of India, succeeded for some time in thwarting the designs and challenge of the English and the Dutch. But the Indian rulers, being tired of the Portuguese pretensions and arrogance, began to extend favour to the lately arrived European nations in order to balance the power of the Portuguese. At length the English and the Dutch succeeded in overthrowing the Portuguese supremacy in the Indian seas. Some English vessels blockaded Goa in 1623, although they were forced to retire. The English supported the Persians in conquering Ormuz and were indirectly responsible for the losses that the Portuguese suffered.

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

Like other parts in the East as well as in India, the rivalry of the European nations was no less intense in Bengal. For the first time in 1615, the Dutch ships arrived in Bengal. The Dutch fleet joined the king of Arrakan and fought the Portuguese near the coast of Arrakan. Thereafter the Dutch began their trade in Bengal although they did not permanently settle in the province until towards the middle of the 17th century when they established their factory in Hughli. While the Dutch were rapidly extending their commercial activities in the coastal region of Hughli, the Portuguese suffered a disaster at the hands of the Mughals in 1632. After this disaster the Portuguese trade in Bengal was of no consequence.

The Dutch in Bengal

The maiden attempt of the English to open trade with Bengal in 1617 through the influence of Sir Thomas Roe was a failure. The attempts of Hughes and Parker in 1620 and that of Peter Mundy in 1632 to establish factories in Patna were also unsuccessful. The first English ship that arrived in Orissa suffered a terrible discomfiture at the hands of the Portuguese. The early correspondences of the English factors refer to the Portuguese supremacy as well as to the ports under the Portuguese command. It was the farman of Shah Jahan that permitted the English to trade in Bengal duty-free.

The English in Bengal

Doubtless, the Dutch and the English contributed much to the decline of the Portuguese trade and their commercial supremacy in Bengal. But it was the Mughals who dealt the fatal blow at the Portuguese power in Bengal. "Once their best friends, the Mughals proved to be their worst enemies. The siege of Hughly in 1632 was the beginning of the downfall of the Portuguese in Western Bengal."<sup>1</sup>

The Portuguese settlement grew up in Hughli at the end of the 16th century. But the place was not politically a Portuguese colony nor any part of the dominion of the king of Portugal governed by an agent of that king. It was simply a residence of a small group of professional Portuguese traders, living in a Muslim territory. The settlement was neither under the supervision or control of the Portuguese governor of Goa nor under the Portuguese governor of Cylon. Sultan Mahmud Shah and emperor Akbar permitted them to build factories, custom-houses and to carry on their trade undisturbed. In fact, the

Internal factors:  
Portuguese at  
Hughli

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

Portuguese were never granted extra-territorial rights within their settlements in Chittagong, Satgaon and Hughli as the European nations enjoyed in China in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Portuguese traders in their settlements were allowed to administer their religious affairs undisturbed, but they were under obligation to execute the Muslim king's orders, submit to his law courts, and pay his taxes like other subjects. They were to pay 'peshkash' and pay homage to every Mughal sovereign on his accession to the throne like other foreigners in the country. The Portuguese settlement at Hughli was quite wide in extent. They had bought lands and possessed villages on both sides of the river for a considerable distance from their town of Hughli. Father Cabral says that the Portuguese did not confine themselves to the banks of the river but extended their settlement "sixty leagues inland". The Portuguese population increased very rapidly since the establishment of their settlement. Besides, the number of the converts also began to increase on a wide scale.

Although the Portuguese extended their trade far and wide in the province, their position at Hughli was weak from the beginning. They were practically nobody's concern and neither the Portuguese government of Goa nor the home government at Lisbon had anything to do with the Portuguese settlers in Bengal. Spanish domination over Portugal sapped the very foundations of the Portuguese power in the west as well as in the east. The Spanish kings, Philip III and Philip IV, were completely averse to the commercial interests of the Portuguese and this attitude of the Spanish kings made the position of the Portuguese settlers in Bengal very unhappy and critical. They were never looked upon as citizens of Portugal either by the Lisbon Government or by the Madrid Government. During the second decade of the 17th century, the empire of the Spanish king Philip IV in the Indies was suffering from an acute want of money, ships and even men to work the ships. "Sailors could not be found to man her (Portugal's) fleets even when outlaws and convicts were set at liberty. Even the expedition of the Governor Estevao da Gama who came to India in 1540 was chiefly composed of convicts. The later Portuguese were not of the type of Albuquerque, Cunah or Castro."<sup>1</sup> Thus the Portuguese in Bengal neither enjoyed any kind of patronage from their home country nor they possessed men of calibre to organise them in a better way. However, in course of time the Portuguese became independent

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<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

of the Mughal emperor in as much as they discontinued to pay the nominal tribute despite the remonstrations of the Mughal governor of Bengal.

Our information about the Portuguese system of government in Hughli is very meagre. There are adequate accounts left about the

Portuguese possessions in western India, but their doings in Bengal and the names of the principal actors have been consigned to oblivion. The names of only three governors or captains in Hughli that can be given are Pedro Tavares (1580—who was the founder of the Portuguese settlement in Hughli), Miguel Rodrigues (1623) and Manoel d'Azavedo (1632).<sup>1</sup>

About the state of early rule of the Portuguese in Hughli, there are two accounts which in the opinion of Campos "contain doubtful statements". Van Linschoten who travelled in India

between 1583 and 1589 observed in 1589 that at Chittagong and Hughli, "the Portuguese have no forts nor any government, nor police as in India (i.e. in Portuguese India or the Goa and Daman territory), but live in a manner like wild men and untamed horses, for that every man doth there what he will and every man is lord (and master). Neither esteem they anything of justice, whether there be any or none, and in this manner do certain Portugals dwell among them. . . and are for the most part such as dare not stay in India (i.e. Portuguese India) for some wicked things by them committed (there)".<sup>2</sup> Pyrard de Laval who visited Chittagong in 1607, generalised the conditions of the Portuguese in Hughli thus : "A large number of Portuguese dwell in freedom at the ports of this coast of Bengal; they are also very free in their lives being like exiles. They do not traffic, without any fort, order or police, and live like natives of the country; they durst not return to India (i.e. Goa territory) for certain misdeeds they have committed and they have no clergy among them."<sup>3</sup>

These two accounts have generalised the condition of the Portuguese in Hughli. But this was certainly the condition of the Portuguese in Hughli in its formative stage. Van Linschoten was in Bengal not more than five years after the Portuguese had settled in Hughli. Presumably during the initial stage, the Portuguese could not have organised some:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Van Linschoten, *The Voyage*, etc., I, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage*, etc., I, p. 334.

sort of a settled government and there might have existed many abuses and lapses.

Besides, Van Linschoten was misinformed about Hughli on certain points or he applied to Hughli what he saw in Chittagong just as the later traveller Pyrard de Laval did. "If in 1580" writes Campos, "there was a Portuguese Governor in Hughli to whom Mir-Najat Khan fled for protection, it is difficult to conceive how there could be no government at all only about five years after, especially since all evidence points to the fact that the Portuguese were flourishing rather than degenerating into 'untamed horses'."<sup>1</sup> So far as Pyrard de Laval is concerned, it is to be noted that he did not visit Hughli at all. Presumably, he generalised the condition of the Portuguese in Hughli from his experience at Chittagong. While Ralph Fitch who was in Hughli in 1588 has referred to Hughli as a flourishing town in the possession of the Portuguese. Further, Pyrard de Laval's statement that the Portuguese in Hughli had no clergy in 1607 seems to be erroneous. In fact, the religious orders, Jesuits and the Augustinians had by the end of the 16th century built up many churches in Hughli and doubtless the great Augustinian convent built in 1599 had priests and clergy. Manrique has made a casual reference to Portuguese government in Hughli when he says that "there was a government which did not think it fit to send an embassy to Shah Jahan on his ascending the throne".<sup>2</sup>

However, as the 17th century advanced, the growing prosperity and popularity of Hughli as a trading centre secured for it some sort of recognition from the Portuguese authorities at Lisbon although the settlement in Hughli did not receive the full status of a colony. According to Cabral, the Portuguese enjoyed absolute independence and they were allowed by the Mughal government to manage their local affairs including defence provided the imperial suzerainty was not denied. The Mughals remained content with merely collecting custom duties and market dues. "This is a fact which Shah Jahan confirms." Such was the extent of their power that even the emperor's envoy could not enter the Portuguese town of Hughli without the consent of the Portuguese and "the Mughal ships had to submit themselves to many regulations which the Portuguese enforced in their port". From the writings of the Portuguese travellers and historians, we get some idea about the pattern of the Portuguese government in Hughli. The

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

king of Spain and Portugal nominated to Hughli a Captain Convidor as a sort of Mayor with four assistants annually elected by the citizens. The captain was obeyed by common folk and even by the gentry of the place. Cabral says that it was the king of Portugal who appointed these officials in Hughli showing thereby that the Portuguese of Hughli were loyal to the Crown. Mannuci who visited Hughli in 1660 does not refer in his *Storia do Mogor* to any Portuguese officials though he has referred to numerous Portuguese merchants in Hughli. The settlement and port of Hughli was placed under the authority of the Portuguese governor of Ceylon as Goa was too distant and communication with the latter involved considerable delay. Although the Portuguese in Hughli managed their affairs independently, they never attempted to shake off the authority of the Portuguese viceroy "who from time to time communicated to the King of Portugal the state of affairs in the Portuguese possession of Hughli".

In spite of brilliant opportunities, the Portuguese failed to establish themselves as a strong power politically and militarily. Their moral degeneration was even greater than their military weakness. The dominant white gentry led indolent and luxurious lives, indulging in immoral pleasures and pursuing their jealous quarrels about dignity and rank thereby utterly neglecting their political and military duties. As Campos writes : "The civil virtues of the earlier rulers had given place to venality and corruption. Concealed beneath the pomp and splendour of the Portuguese grandees in India lay the seeds of decay and dissolution. Vice and corruption. . . were but the symptoms of the impending collapse. The earlier Portuguese were schooled in hard facts while those who followed were easy-going and reaped the harvest which had been sown after years of hard struggles. Growing immensely rich without any difficulty, they lost themselves in a whirl of orgies."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Portuguese in Hughli could not organise themselves into a happy family or even an orderly civil society. They were divided into three distinct social orders, viz. pure Europeans (a small group), half-breeds (who were numerous) and the black peasants and slaves (who formed the lower and depressed caste). Again the small body of pure Europeans was divided into two orders, viz. the priests and the laymen. Pride, jealousy and conflict of material interests kept these two higher orders separate from each other. The lack of unity

Moral degeneration of the Portuguese

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, pp. 121-22.

among them made it impossible to offer any successful opposition to any invader. All the manual works like fortifications, rowing the ships and serving the naval guns—were done by the Bengalis of the peasant-class. They were not the citizens of the Portuguese town but lived in the outskirts of the town with their families without any protection. Their defenceless situation made them an easy prey to the Mughals when the latter invaded Hughli. Their defection completely paralysed the defence of the port. In fact, at the time of the Mughal invasion upon Hughli, only the Europeans and the half-breeds, assisted by a small body of black Christians, had to fight, while the vast Indian population of the port remained inactive. Thus it is evident that by the third decade of the 17th century, the Portuguese power in Hughli reached the verge of collapse and the imperial attack in 1632 completed their downfall.

**The Mughal attack and the fall of Hughli.** The Mughals, once the great friends of the Portuguese, ultimately turned into their worst enemies. Several factors contributed to the antagonism of the Mughals towards the Portuguese and ultimately brought about the clash. Both Akbar and Jahangir placed high hopes on the Portuguese and expected that they would devote their energy and resources entirely to the development and improvement of their trade and commerce which would in turn make the province prosperous and augment the state treasury. Further as the Portuguese were superior in naval arms and fleet, Akbar and Jahangir expected that the Portuguese would prove a better instrument for protecting the coastal region of Bengal against the Magh depredations which the imperial government had so far been not able to provide. Under these high expectations, Akbar and Jahangir left the Portuguese in undisturbed enjoyment of their rights and privileges at Hughli. But Shah Jahan had to revise the policy of his predecessors and within five years of his accession to the imperial throne, an imperial army made an assault upon Hughli and expelled the Portuguese therefrom.

There are two versions of the 'Casus Belli'. According to Muhammadan version of the Casus Belli

to have sent a report to Shah Jahan complaining, "that instead of confining their attention to the business of merchants, the Portuguese had fortified themselves in that place (Hughli) and were become so insolent that they committed many acts of violence upon the subjects of the empire and presumed to exact duties from all the boats and



vessels which passed their factory and had completely drawn away all the commerce from the ancient port of Satgaon, that the Portuguese were in the habit of kidnapping or purchasing poor children and sending them as slaves to other parts of India and that their pirates in consort with the Mughls committed innumerable aggressions on the inhabitants of the districts on the eastern branch of the Ganges."<sup>1</sup> All these accusations do not seem to be wholly correct. It is true that the Portuguese in Hughli had grown insolent and sometimes defied the imperial government, they were not in collusion with the Magh-Feringi pirates of Chittagong. The Portuguese settlers of Hughli themselves never resorted to piracy in the Mughal territorial waters, nor committed depredations into the Mughal territory for capturing slaves. They, however, bought slaves sold by the pirates of Chittagong as they would buy of any body else. The pirates of Chittagong resorted to kidnapping people and committing atrocities on the Bengalis who happened to fall into their hands. The Indians naturally could not make a distinction between the Portuguese of Hughli and their compatriots of Chittagong in fixing the responsibility for the atrocities and enslavement committed by the same race. The Portuguese of Hughli thus had to share the odium of their compatriots of Chittagong. Of course, there might have been some private Portuguese individuals against whom the accusations made by the Mughals might have been rightly made.

Another cause of emperor Shah Jahan's antagonism was that the empress who had a positive dislike for the Portuguese prevailed upon the emperor to expel them from Bengal. "When she was in Bengal (with Shah Jahan as a rebel prince) she is said to have been offended very much at the sight of the holy pictures and images which were in the Portuguese churches."<sup>2</sup> Manucci writes that the Portuguese gave the empress Mumtaz Mahal much affront by kidnapping two of her beloved slaves which they refused to return in spite of repeated remonstrations from the imperial court.

The third cause of the emperor's antagonism was the evangelical zeal of the Portuguese and their efforts to convert the Mughal subjects into Christianity by hook or crook. Emperor Shah Jahan's bigotry came into sharp clash with the evangelical zeal of the Portuguese of Hughli and hence their expulsion from Bengal appeared to be the only remedy.

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 132.

Lastly, the growing Portuguese population and Portuguese armaments in Hughli and their known naval superiority threatened the creation of an 'imperium in imperio' along the coast of the river Hughli, so that the Mughal emperor "could not but conceive great fears lest His Majesty of Spain should possess himself of the Kingdom of Bengal".<sup>1</sup>

There is another version of the 'Casus Belli' given by Cabral. In his report on the capture of Hughli by the Mughals in 1632 written only one year after the incident refers to four charges as brought by emperor Shah Jahan against the Portuguese. First, that Shah Jahan was very much affronted by one Manoel Tavares, a country-born Portuguese who having gone to his help with a few boats when he rose in revolt against his father, had deserted him at a critical juncture. Secondly, that the Portuguese of Hughli did not send him an embassy to congratulate him on his accession to the imperial throne. Thirdly, that the Portuguese of Hughli were in league with the king of Arrakan who often resorted to depredations in the Mughal territories and were supplying the Arrakan king with sailors, munitions and war-boats. Fourthly, that a Portuguese captain of Chittagong seized a fair and pretty Mughal lady during one of his piratical raids whom the captain refused to surrender. According to Cabral, the fourth incident precipitated the crisis.

Now, the *Baharistan* of Mirza Nathan proves the first charge to be true wholly, while Cabral makes a brief admission of it. It is true that in 1624, when the rebel prince Shah Jahan brought Bengal and Bihar under his occupation, the Portuguese of Dacca in the expectation of favourable concessions and privileges, joined the rebel prince and proceeded with their boats and guns upto the bank of the river Tons. Their leaders were Manoel Tavares and Miguel Rodrigues. But ultimately being seduced by the imperial commander Prince Parvez, the Portuguese proved traitors to the rebel prince and deserted him at a very critical moment. This desertion ruined the cause of the rebel prince and he had to take to flight. The Portuguese gave Shah Jahan another cause of affront by helping the Sultan Adil Shah of Bijapur against the imperialists, which resulted in the loss of 50,000 imperial horses. As regards the second charge, Cabral himself has admitted it to be true. As for the third charge, it is to be noted that in those

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 322.

days, it was the usual practice of European adventurers to sell arms and ammunitions to the Indian princes. There was never any kind of prohibition against such practice. As for the fourth charge, Manrique has admitted the fact that he "himself intervened the lady to console her daughter and mother-in-law in their misfortune".<sup>1</sup>

Whatever might have been the real pretext of the war against the Portuguese, it will be reasonable to suppose that the piratical activities of the Feringis of Chittagong, the evangelical zeal of the Portuguese, their treachery to Shah Jahan when he was in revolt against his father and their default in sending an embassy to congratulate Shah Jahan on his accession—all these factors provoked Shah Jahan to attack Hughli.

**The Siege of Hughli, 1632.** Cabral's report, Abdul Hamid Lahori's *Padishahnamah* and Khafi Khan's *Muntakhab-ul-Lubab* refer in detail to the siege of Hughli by the Mughals and the war between the latter and the Portuguese. The accounts of the Muslim historians differ on certain points from those of the Portuguese historians.

Kasim Khan, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, was ordered by Shah Jahan to make an assault upon Hughli as well as to expel the Portuguese therefrom. The viceroy knew it well that the task was not so easy and he was aware of his own side's deficiency in fire-arms and naval skill. So he had to undertake his preparations with extreme caution so as to overwhelm the enemy by a sudden attack. His plan of attack was two-fold—to block the path of retreat of the Portuguese down the Ganges to the open sea and to prevent the arrival of reinforcements to them by ship either from Chittagong or from Goa.

He organised three forces which were to move by different directions at different times and make a junction at the time of assault.

He first detached Bahadur Kambu with a requisite force in the direction of Murshidabad outwardly for taking possession of the crown lands there, but the general was ordered to wait at Murshidabad for other forces. The second force was detached under the command of the viceroy's son Inayetullah in the direction of Burdwan. To deceive the Portuguese the viceroy gave out that the expedition was designed against the refractory landlords of Hijli. This force halted at Burdwan awaiting the further direction from the viceroy. The third detach-

Mughal  
preparations

Three detach-  
ments in three  
directions

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<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

ment was constituted of the imperial fleet joined by the war-boats of the loyal landlords under Masum Khan. The fleet advanced from Sripur and arrived at Sankrail (10 miles below Calcutta) and blocked the channel of the Ganges. Stewart writes that the third detachment "proceeded by water to take possession of the river below Hughli and by constructing a bridge of boats at Seerpore (possibly Serampore) to cut off the retreat of the Portuguese".<sup>1</sup>

On 14 June, 1632, the imperial fleet having arrived at Sankrail, the other two divisions from Burdwan and Murshidabad made a haste and joined the fleet without raising any suspicion in the mind of the Portuguese at Hughli. According to Manrique, the troops were commanded by fourteen nawabs (Muraos); according to Nicolan by eighteen nawabs and according to Asiaticus by twenty-two 'Omrahs'. The fleet consisted of five hundred ships. The combined forces hastened south to Sankrail and threw a bridge of boats across the Ganges at the narrow straits. Trenches were also raised on both banks of the river. In August big guns and other firearms arrived from Dacca, Burdwan and Rajmahal. These were mounted on the batteries and chains were drawn across the Ganges at different places. These arrangements practically sealed the fate of Hughli, as the water-route down the Ganges to the open sea was closed by the imperialists. Several parties were immediately sent to plunder the region belonging to the Portuguese and to destroy every Portuguese they could find. As Hughli had been for many years a flourishing port, a number of mariners and boatmen were settled in its vicinity. All these were seized and forced to help the invading imperialists in erecting batteries and to work the artillery in the use of which the imperialists were not efficient.

The first portion of the imperial army appeared at a place three miles from Hughli on 16 June. The second portion arrived soon. The fleet appeared on 24 June (1632) in the river about ten leagues south of Hughli. Two days later the imperial army consisting of one hundred and fifty thousand men, ninety elephants and fourteen thousand horses began the operation by advancing from the north within a league from the town. The Portuguese defenders, on the other hand, consisted of only 300 whites, 600 native Christians and 4000 Bengali sailors for manning the war-boats. Captain Mandel de

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, pp. 167-68.

Azavedo conducted the defence.<sup>1</sup> According to Cabral and Manrique, the Portuguese had neither a fort nor even artillery of any consequence. In the words of Cabral: "The city had no walls nor artillery of any kind. What musketry they had—there was much of it and of good quality—was distributed and Captains appointed."<sup>2</sup>

Waile Khafi Khan precisely says that the Portuguese had a strong fort with towers and embattlements furnished with artillery, but Hamid Lahori, the author of *Padishahnamah*, has not distinctly mentioned any fort though he has admitted that the Portuguese had erected large substantial buildings fortified with canon and muskets and that the town was well defended by the river on one side and on the other three sides by a ditch. Probably, the Portuguese only erected barricades during the siege.

The plan of the Mughals was to make assault simultaneously by land and by water. The invading army first captured the lands in the possession of the Portuguese on both sides of the river outside the town. On 2 July the combined assault was made. But the invaders suffered severely from the musket-fire of the Portuguese concealed in a garden. Both sides became eager for peace and entered into negotiations. The Portuguese were being pressed by their peace-loving property owners while the Mughals had been awaiting the arrival of fresh reinforcements from Dacca and other places when they would deliver another assault on the town. The Portuguese were also expecting assistance from their compatriots—the Feringis of Arrakan. But just at this moment the Feringis of Arrakan were involved in hostilities with the Mugh king and the Portuguese government of Goa was without ships, men or money. Hence Hughli was left to its fate unaided. However, in their eagerness to purchase peace, the civil population of Hughli paid one lakh of rupees to the Mughal commander and delivered to the Mughals four ships and ninety Christian slaves. But Kasim Khan raised his demand to seven lakhs of rupees and the total disarming of Hughli. Perceiving the duplicity of the imperial commander, the Portuguese resolved to fight to death and hence hostilities were soon resumed.

Peace negotiations

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 325.

The Mughal forces pressed on and heavy firings from the imperial guns made the suburbs of Hughli untenable. The Portuguese gave up the defence of Bali and retired southwards to the town of Hughli. While retiring they set fire to their buildings and to the great Augustinian convent.

Hostilities resumed

The Mughals after occupying Bali completed the destruction of the Portuguese buildings but spared the Jesuit College where their officers took up their quarters. From 31 July the Mughals started their assault upon the main town of Hughli and the few Portuguese under the command of Manoel de Azavedo offered a stiff resistance although without any defence. The Mughal commander Bahadur Khan began to raid the neighbouring villages and seized the families of the 4000 Bengali sailors in the service of the Portuguese. Being frightened, those Bengali sailors abandoned the service of the Portuguese and came over to the Mughals. As a result, the Portuguese defence was thoroughly paralysed. However, the hostilities continued. The Portuguese were few in number and they kept themselves mainly on the defensive.

Early in the month of August (1632), reinforcements reached the Mughal commander from Dacca and other places and also a party of Portuguese under the traitor Martin Affonso de Mello with his big ships. "This man now became the engineer and Commissary General" of the invaders and supplied the spearhead of the Mughal attack. The Mughal troops dug up trenches and mined the whole of Bandel. Thereafter, they launched a naval and a land attack. But the Portuguese ships stood the attack bravely. In this way the fighting continued for a month and a half. Again the Mughals opened negotiations for peace and the Portuguese in their anxiety to rid themselves of the scourage paid one lakh of rupees. The Mughals, however, never meant to end the hostilities, but only under false promise to extort money from the besieged in order to pay soldiers who were clamouring for their salaries. Meanwhile the traitor Affonso de Mello, with a view to bar the flight of Portuguese down the river, threw across the river many thick cables and iron chains. Several naval attacks were made, but they failed due to the superior skill of the defenders.

At length, the Portuguese, unable to hold on the town any longer, took to their ships under cover of darkness and began their disastrous flight on the night of 24 September. Only a few Portuguese remained in Hughli and continued the fire to give an idea to the invaders that the town was not evacuated. The Portuguese could have made a

dash down to the sea in safety, but the retreat was mismanaged and conducted without a plan. On 25 September, the Mughals launched a violent attack and captured the town of Hughli. The slaughter of the Portuguese was very great. Many in attempting to escape to their boats, were drowned, a few of them got to their ships in safety. "The captain of the largest vessel on which were embarked 2000 men, women and children, with all their wealth, rather than yield to the Muhammadans, set fire to the magazine and blew them up; many other ships followed his example. Out of 64 large vessels. . . only one grab and two sloops belonging to Goa made their escape." Many of the Portuguese boats were sunk by the shore batteries. In fact, the Portuguese suffered little loss of life in actual fighting on land during a siege of three months. It was only when they attempted to slip away in their ships down the river, that they suffered heavy casualties from the fire of the Mughal musketeers. It was after a great disaster both in men and materials that the surviving Portuguese reached safely at Sagar island where they were met by relieving ships from Dianga and Goa.

**The losses on either sides.** About a hundred Portuguese were killed. Besides these four Augustinians, three Jesuits and twenty-five married soldiers with their children lost their lives. Cabral Portuguese losses has not given the number of the "slaves and the coloured people" lost. But the author of *Padishahnamah* boasts that "ten thousand of the enemy—men and women, old and young, were slain, drowned or burnt and 4,400 Christians, male and female were made captives". According to the Batavia Dagh Register (1631-1634) it is mentioned that 1,560 Portuguese were killed and 1500 taken prisoners. According to Campos, four thousand Portuguese prisoners were sent to Agra and they were produced before the Emperor on 8 July 1633. They were offered liberty at the cost of conversion to Islam or lifelong enslavement on refusal. According to *Padishahnamah*, "some of them agreed to the conversion, but most refused. Those who refused were kept permanently in prison; most of them died in captivity".<sup>1</sup> Dwelling on the sufferings of the Portuguese captives, Manrique writes : "The Chief Portuguese and the women who most attracted him (Emperor) were included among those kept by the Emperor. These women he ordered to be put in the mahal or seraglio, and the men in the public jail."<sup>2</sup> Referring

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, F.N.

to the cruelties to which the Portuguese prisoners were subjected in Agra, Bernier writes that they were all made slaves; the handsome women were shut up in the seraglio, the old women and others were distributed among the nobles; the young boys were circumcised and made pages.<sup>1</sup>

On the Mughal side the losses were not insignificant. According to *Padishahnamah*, one thousand imperial soldiers were slain in the conflict. According to Cabral 4,300 imperial soldiers Mughal losses were killed including Bengal troops and 25 'ahadis'.

As to the vessels of the imperialists, Cabral says "they lost 32 boats in the fire raft engagement, more than 60 in the pontoon affair and more than a hundred of their ships remained stranded on the shore, disabled for ever".<sup>2</sup>

Thus Hughli came into an effective possession of the Mughal government and it was turned into a royal port of Bengal. A regular faujdar was appointed who in the process of time, was made independent of the imperial governor of Bengal. All the public officers were withdrawn from Satgaon.

**The return of the Portuguese to Hughli.** The return of the Portuguese to Hughli scarcely a year after their expulsion in 1632 is really surprising. This is all the more surprising in view of the fact Farman of 1633 that Shah Jahan was at that time greatly ill-disposed towards the Christians and had not ceased persecuting them even upto 1635. "Yet it is true the Portuguese returned to Bengal with full liberty and a grant of 777 bighas of rent-free land by July 1633."<sup>3</sup> A letter dated 17 July 1633 written from Harishpur (Orissa) to the English factor at Balasore refers to the affairs of the Portuguese thus : "Those Portuguese expelled from Hughli have found great favour with Shahjahan and returned that place to the number of 20 persons. . . with large privileges and presents the king has bestowed on them. So that our expectation of Hughli is frustrated. . ."<sup>4</sup> The imperial farman issued in 1633, besides granting 777 bighas of rent-free land, conceded to the Portuguese seventeen religious and commercial privileges, viz. that at the time of the service of the church, no Muslim soldier or officer should enter the church, that the Bishop should be allowed to administer justice to the inhabitants of the locality

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



under the Portuguese possession; that the Bishop would be empowered to dispose the property of the deceased Christian citizen; that in the event of the death of the owners of the ships of both the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Mughal government would not interfere with any of the ships' goods; that the Dutch would not be allowed to seize the Portuguese ships coming to Bengal; that the Portuguese would be allowed to sell their goods in any part of Bengal and there should not be any change in the custom dues; that the Dutch were to be allowed to retain the servants of whatever class of Christians if they ran away to another territory; that in time of scarcity, no ship should be allowed to export rice from Hughli; that families coming from Europe were to be allowed to remain in Hughly without any hindrance from the Mughal government; that the Mughal faujdar was to be empowered to call all the Christians for military service in case of war.<sup>1</sup>

On the strength of this farman of Shah Jahan, the Portuguese came back to Hughli once again and since then they continued their religious and commercial activities peacefully. In 1641, Farman of 1641 Prince Shah Shuja, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, granted them a fresh farman confirming all the privileges of the first farman and assuring them his protection.

Whatever might have been the reason of allowing the Portuguese to return to Hughli, by the imperial government, it is undeniable that they never regained their former power and commercial prosperity. In the East, the political power of the Portuguese had been on the wane and other European rivals of the Portuguese had appeared in Bengal who had been striving to establish their supremacy by supplanting the power of the Portuguese. In 1625 the Dutch obtained a farman from Shah Jahan to build a factory at Hughli and to trade in Bengal. The Portuguese could not prevent their European rivals from setting their feet in Bengal, nor could they compete successfully with them. The English who were, for a long time, powerless in Bengal in face of the Portuguese supremacy, obtained a farman from the Mughal emperor to trade in Bengal in 1638 and gradually other European traders stepped in. However, in spite of the arrival of other European nations, the Portuguese trade continued to flourish to a considerable extent. For instance, referring to the Portuguese in Hughli in 1660, Manucci writes : "Here I found the chief inhabitants

Decadent Portuguese power

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

of Hughli, all of them rich Portuguese for in those days they alone were allowed to deal in salt throughout the province of Bengal. . . . There were many Portuguese of good sense, of good family, well established merchants at Hughli.”<sup>1</sup> Six years later, Bernier says that there were eight and nine thousand Portuguese settlers in Hughli. According to Bowrey, by the year 1680, the number of the Portuguese in Hughli was round about twenty thousand. But after 1650 A. D., the commercial rivalry between the Portuguese and the other European traders continued to be intense and in that struggle the Portuguese eventually fell. “In the 18th century, the Portuguese played a subordinate part in Bengal and their history merges into that of their descendants.”<sup>2</sup>

### *Portuguese Piracy in Bengal*

While a section of the Portuguese had been carrying on trade and commerce in Chittagong, Satgaon and Hughli since their advent in the province of Bengal, another section took to piracy and in alliance with the Arrakanese commonly known as Maghs, had been carrying on depredations in Lower Bengal. This latter class of the Portuguese were sea-rovers and lawless subjects of the king of Portugal. With the growth of the Portuguese empire both in the West and the East, the mother country had not the necessary surplus population for the development of the far-flung colonies. “Convicts were, therefore, given the option of serving their terms at home or seeking their fortune in the east and it is no wonder that some of the worst criminals found their way to Bengal.”<sup>3</sup> They were neither under the control of the Portuguese government at Goa nor were their settlements in South-east India lawful and recognised by the king of Portugal. Therefore, they occupy a minor place in the history of Portugal. They were out and out adventurers, less inclined to the settled way of life, took to piracy as a normal avocation of life and harassed the coastal districts of lower Bengal for more than a century.

It is to be noted that contemporary European travellers described them as “wild men” and “untamed horses”. According to Van Linschoten, some of the worst characters of Portugal who were annually drafted to India, left the more orderly Portuguese

<sup>1</sup> *Storia do Mogor, II*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, F. N., p. 47.

settlements on the west coast for the ports of the Bay of Bengal which had neither any civilised society nor orderly government. Their chief bases in the East were Sondwip, Sirium (Pegu) and Dianga.

The Portuguese pirates in Bengal were commonly known as 'Feringis' and 'Harmads'. Regarding the origin of the word Feringi, Compos writes : "Frank is the parent word of Feringhi by which name, the India-born Portuguese are still known. The Arabs and the Persians called the French Crusaders Frank, Ferang, a corruption of France. When the Portuguese and other Europeans came to India, the Arabs applied to them the same name Ferang and then Feringhi."<sup>1</sup>

The geographical position of Bengal greatly influenced the activities of the sea-rovers. Woven as it is by a network of rivers and rivulets, Bengal offered the sea-faring people like the Feringi and Magh pirates the greatest scope for their instincts of maritime activities and love for adventure. This very geographical character of Bengal fostered among them a greed for piracy and plunder. "In a labyrinth of rivers", writes Campos, "the adventurers could dive and dart, appear and disappear, ravage the country and escape with impunity. Hence Bengal has been the victims of exploits and depredations of foreign and native adventurers alike who inclined by temperament or driven by circumstance looked to privateering as the best and most convenient method of making a bid for wealth."<sup>2</sup>

In Jahangir's reign, the pirates, the Maghs and the Feringis, used to come to Dacca for plunder and abduction, by the 'nullah' which leaves the Brahmaputra, passed by Khizrpur and joins the 'nullah' of Dacca. Khizrpur is situated on the bank of the river Lakhiya commanding the only water-route to Dacca from this side. In the monsoons all the land-routes were submerged under water and, therefore, the government of Dacca at the end of the monsoons and during the winter which was the season of the coming of the pirates, used to go to Khizrpur with an army and encamped there. After some years, the "nullah" dried up and many places in the track of the pirates in Brahmaputra river also became unfordable. Thus their

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, F.N., p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

route to Dacca was closed on this side and restricted to the side of Jatrapur (some 25 miles west of Dacca) and Vikrampur. As the pirates could more easily carry out their chief design of kidnapping people in the villages of Dacca and other parganas, they did not exert themselves to reach Dacca town.

When the pirates used to come from Chittagong to molest Bengal, they passed by Bhulua, commanding the route to and from Arrakan, particularly Chittagong, and reached the village of Sangramgarh. From this point, if they desired to plunder Jessore, Bhusna and Hughli, they moved up the Ganges; if they desired to plunder Vikrampur, Sonargaon and Dacca, they used to proceed up the Brahmaputra. Sangramgarh was the land at the extremity of island which contained Dacca and other towns and villages.<sup>1</sup> Chittagong, being midway between Bengal on the northwest and Arrakan on the south, was the greatest stronghold of the pirates and "from Chittagong, they constantly led plundering raids into the coastal territories of southern and eastern Bengal, ranging from Hughli, Jessore, Bhushna and Bakla, to Vikrampur, Sonargaon and even Dacca, passing first by the island of Sondwip on the left and Bhulua on the right."<sup>2</sup>

By 1597 the Portuguese traders built up their settlements and factories in Hughli and Satgaon in western Bengal. The Feringi pirates were not sitting idle. They also created a sphere of their own influence in the eastern waters.

Strongholds of the Feringis

In 1602 they seized Sondwip, an island in the Bay of Bengal and a half way house between Bengal and Chittagong, under the leadership of Carvalho and his compatriots. Although they subsequently suffered a great reverse at the hands of the king of Arrakan who claimed his suzerainty on Sondwip, in 1605, Sebastian Gonzales, the bravest of the Feringi pirates, reconquered Sondwip from the hands of the Arrakanese and held undisputed sway till 1616 A.D. They had two other strongholds in the domain of the king of Arrakan, one at Dianga, 20 miles south of Chittagong town, south of the mouth of Karnafuli river, and the other further south, on the Arrakan coast at Syriam (Pegu). The Portuguese sea-rovers were a race of very competent seamen. They were not lawful subjects of the king of Portugal nor did they fully submit themselves to the king of Arrakan. Moreover, they owed no allegiance to the Portuguese governor at Goa. They often allied themselves with the Maghs of

<sup>1</sup> *The Feringhi Pirates of Chittagong*, vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 244.

Chittagong and fought under the banner of the Arrakan king against the Mughals in Bengal. A few Portuguese pirates and adventurers entered the services of some of the landlords of Bengal like Kedar Rai of Sripur, Pratapaditya of Jessore and Ramchandra of Bakla.

**Navies of the Feringis.** Like the Maghs, the Feringi pirates were renowned for their naval dexterity and the possession of a large number of ships of various sizes, well equipped with artillery and other munitions, enabled them to establish their sway over the Bay of Bengal for some time. Their flotilla included 'kartus', 'jalias', 'frigates', small 'barks' and the like. Unlike their compatriots at Goa, the Feringis had no regular system in Eastern India. At Goa, "the ships were equipped at the expense of the king. . . . and the soldiers paid from the king's purse",<sup>1</sup> but no such privileges were accorded to their 'outlaws' in Eastern waters. Here individual Feringi had his own boats manned by his own men and expenses thereof borne by himself. Nevertheless, they were subjected to the General of the Armada who was called 'Captain Major' in times of naval expeditions.<sup>2</sup>

Their vessels were generally small in size, their prows low, but their poops extremely high and had no keel. For a cabin, a kind of box was placed on the poop, large enough to hold one bed. For defence, there were many bundles of lances on board and for a cooking store, "a basket be doubled with clay".<sup>3</sup> About the smallness of the size of vessels, Pyrard also confirms that "on board ship, there is so little room that when you lie down, you can hardly stretch yourself at full length".<sup>4</sup> Besides the 'people and goods', there was provision for the slaves and captives lying under the deck in scores. The boat which carried Manrique from Pipli to Hughli carried 80 of them. While sailing, the Feringi pirates used tents of palm leaves for the purpose of protecting themselves from rain and slept on mats and mattresses or carpets of Persia which were folded up and laid aside in the morning.

In their naval operations, the Feringis used swift-going crafts called 'galleys' or 'galliot'. These crafts contained 15 to 20 benches on each side with one man to each oar and could accommodate as many as 100 persons. In the smaller ones, there was provision for 40 to 50 'men-at-arms'. Their 'kartus' could accommodate 15 to 20 men,

<sup>1</sup> Pyrard, *Voyages*, II, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Roy, *The Navies of the Sea Rovers*, vide, *Hindusthan Standard*—12.2.56.

<sup>3</sup> *Calcutta Review*, 1891.

<sup>4</sup> Pyrard, *Voyages*, II, p. 128.

besides artillery and other munitions. They employed native sailors called 'lascars' besides their own nationals. They always kept native contractors for 'native hands' who received their (native sailors') wages in a lump."<sup>1</sup> The native sailors were allowed to take their wives along with them on their voyages. When they were on sea, they took the ordinary ships' victual, i.e. rice with butter, sugar, lentils and mango. Frequently too, they had biscuits and the 'drink' was water only. Salted fish called 'pesche cavalo' along with rice was their favourite dish on voyages.<sup>2</sup>

In the territories of the king of Arrakan, the Feringis formed the backbone of the Magh navy and their wives enjoyed the privilege of entering the Magh Queen's private apartment. The Arrakan king granted them 'bilatas' or revenue producing lands "on the understanding that they maintained a certain force of their countrymen and also 'gelias' (boats)". The rowers, both Feringis and the natives lived on the Captain's lands on condition of serving whenever called upon to do so.

**The Pirates described.** The Feringi pirates are described in the Eastern Ballards as short statured men, wearing trousers, red coats and turbans on their heads. They kept scabbards bound to their waist belts and guns in their hands. They used corselets but little while they valued highly those collars of buffalo hide and laced jerkins. "On land they wore sailors' breeches which required ten cells of stuff and are exceedingly ample and wide below and reach to the ground; with these they wear no stockings. But when they are on board, they wear them of another style. These are very short and tight and with them they wear no shoes for they say that shoes would deprive them of a firm footing on the vessel whether in the rigging or on the deck."<sup>3</sup> Some of them used to carry telescopes to survey while on board the merchant-ships in the Bay from a distance for the purpose of plunder. In the upstream of the Bay, there were many creeks by the side of the coast. The pirates concealed themselves in these nooks, watching the movements of the merchant-boats laden with goods.<sup>4</sup> "Swift are the small boats of pirates which pass over the Bay like birds over the sky. The 'harmads' do not care at all for their lives; they are

<sup>1</sup> Linschoten, I, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Roy, *The Navies of the Sea Rovers*, vide, *Hindusthan Standard* 12.2.56.

<sup>3</sup> Linschoten, I, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. Roy, *Op. cit.*

a set of desperate people and in naval fights they show unflinching courage and tact.”<sup>1</sup>

**The practices of the Feringi pirates.** From the time of the fall of Gonzales in 1616 A.D., upto 1665, the history of the Portuguese in Eastern Bengal is a history of the Portuguese in their worst form. Gonzales faded away from the pages of history after his failure against the king of Arrakan in 1616, but that did not mean the end of his men well trained in buccaneering activities and naval exploits. The numerous rivers and rivulets of Bengal became their homes after the fall of their leader. They sought the means of subsistence in plundering and piracy. “Arising as a necessity, piracy eventually became an art, a trade.”<sup>2</sup> Playful were the boats of the Feringi pirates and their flags fluttering, they marched keeping time “as it were with the motion of waves”. They used to plunder the goods and sink the boats they happened to meet in the depth of the sea. They used to kill the sailors of the boats they plundered and sometimes bind them in chains and afterwards either sold them or impressed them in their vessels. Although they imparted to the armies and fleet of Bengal a little of their superior skill in military and naval affairs, these buccaneers often assisted and allied by the Maghs, constituted a perpetual threat to the life and security of the people of deltaic Bengal almost throughout the Mughal period. How many Bengali lives were lost and to what extent Bengal’s wealth was plundered by them, it is difficult to ascertain.

Naval superiority and dexterity in firearms made the Feringi pirates irresistible in our eastern waters. The Mughal government practically could do nothing to save the life and property of the people living in the coastal region. As early as 1626, one Subahadar of Bengal, Khanazad Khan had to retire to Rajmahal in fear of the pirates abandoning the defence of Dacca to his subordinates. The horror of their practices can better be imagined than described. Bernier has given a graphic account of them. He writes “for many years there have always been Portuguese in the kingdom of Rakan (Arakan) and with them a great number of their Mesticos or Christian slaves and other Farangies gathered together from all parts. This was the retreat of fugitives from Goa, Ceylon, Cochin, Malacca and all the other places once occupied by the Portuguese in the Indies. Those who had fled from their convent, who had married twice or three times, assassins—in a word, outlaws and ruffians, were here welcomed and held in repute

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<sup>1</sup> *Eastern Ballads, IV*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Campos, Op cit.*, p. 157.

and led a detestable life, utterly unworthy of Christians, going so far as to massacre and poison each other with impunity, and to assassinate their own priests who were often no better than themselves. The King of Rakan, in perpetual terror of the Mughal, kept these people for the defence of his frontier at. . . Chittagong, assigning them lands and letting them live and follow their own devices. Their ordinary pursuit and occupation was theft and piracy. With small and light half-galleys. . . they did nothing but sweep the sea on this side; and entering all rivers, canals and arms of the Ganges and passing between the islands of Lower Bengal—often even penetrating as far as forty or fifty leagues into the interior they surprised and carried off whole villages and harried the poor gentiles and other inhabitants of this quarter at their assemblies, their markets, their festivals and weddings, seizing as slaves both men and women, small and great, perpetrating strange cruelties and burning all that they could not carry away. It is owing to this that as the present day are seen so many lovely but deserted isles at the mouth of the Ganges, once thickly populated but now infested only by savage beasts, principally tigers.”<sup>1</sup> Bernier continuing says that the Feringis sold a part of their captives in Goa, Ceylon and to the Portuguese of Hughli and trained up their converts to Christianity in theft, murder and rapine. Their treatment of the slaves thus obtained was most cruel and they had the audacity to offer for sale in the places recently ravaged by them, the aged people whom they could not use profitably. “It was unusual to see young persons, who had saved themselves by timely flight, endeavouring today to redeem the parent who had been made captive yesterday. Those who were not disabled by age, the pirates either kept in their service, training them up to the love of robbery and practice of assassination. . . . It is lamentable to reflect that other Europeans, since the decline of the Portuguese power have pursued the same flagitious commerce with these pirates who boast the infamous scoundrels that they make more Christians in a 12 month than all the missionaries of the Indies do in ten years.”<sup>2</sup> The pirates both the Feringis and the Maghs constantly plundered Bengal. They carried off the Hindus and Muslims they could seize, “pierced the palms of their hands, passed thin strips of cane through the holes and threw the men huddled together under the decks of their ships. Every morning they flung down some uncooked rice to the captives from above, as people fling grain to fowl. . . . They sold their captives

<sup>1</sup> Bernier, *Travels*, vide, *Calcutta Review*, Vol. LIII, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Calcutta Review*, Vol. LIII, 1871, p. 176.



to the Dutch, English and French merchants at the ports of the Deccan. Sometimes they brought their captives to Tamruk and Balasore for sale at high prices. . . only the Feringis sold their prisoners, but the Maghs employed all whom they could carry off in agriculture and other occupations, or as domestic servants and concubines.”<sup>1</sup> Dwelling on the manner of the sale of captives by the Feringis, Shihabuddin Talish writes, “sometimes they brought the captives for sale at a high price to Tamruk and the port of Balasore. . . . The manner of sale was this. The wretches used to bring the prisoners in their ships, anchor at a short distance from the shores of Tamruk and Balasore and send a man ashore with the news. The local officers, fearing lest the pirates should commit any depredation or kidnapping there, stood on the shore with a number of followers and sent a man with a sum of money to the pirates. If the terms were satisfactory, the pirates took the money and sent the prisoners with the man.”<sup>2</sup> The Raja of Tamruk had to allow the pirates the use of Tamruk as a slave mart under threat of violence. Many of the beautiful girls noticed by Pyrard de Laval in the Goa market were certainly from Bengal. As a result of almost constant depredations by the pirates, the coastal regions of lower Bengal became almost desolated and people in hundreds and thousands leaving their homes and hearths migrated to safer regions. In the words of Talish, “As these raids continued for a long time, Bengal became day by day more desolated. Not a house was left inhabited on either side of the rivers lying on the pirates’ track from Chatgaon to Dacca. The prosperous district of Bakla (Bakherganj) was swept clean with the broom of plunder and kidnapping, so that none was left to occupy any house or kindle a light in that region.”<sup>3</sup>

Since the reign of emperor Jahangir, the Feringi pirates constituted a great terror to the people of the coastal regions till the conquest of Chittagong by Shaista Khan. All throughout this period, the Mughals never succeeded in crushing the power of the pirates nor in preventing them from carrying raids and plunder into the heart of the province. In spite of the strong militia and ‘nawara’ which the Mughals maintained, the pirates “did not cease to make frequent and strange ravages and to penetrate into the country, laughing at all this army of Mughals, having so bold and so expert in the use of

Failure of the  
Mughals to  
check the  
pirates

<sup>1</sup> Talish, *Fathiyya-i-ibriyya* (Cont), pp. 1226-123.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

arms and in navigating these galliasses that four or five of their vessels would not hesitate to attack 14 or 15 of those of the Mughals—destroying, taking or sinking them and coming off with flying colours.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Mughals were no match for the Feringis in respect of the use of firearms and naval dexterity and often they were on the defensive. It was Shaista Khan who succeeded at last in winning over the Feringi pirates to the Mughal side and granted them land and impressed them into imperial service.

### *The Contributions of the Portuguese*

The Portuguese relations with Bengal were never happy. “Their courage was vitiated by cruelty, their inquisitiveness was marred by greed and their progress in the province was ordinarily marked by disorder and lawlessness.”<sup>2</sup> Still, there was something on the credit side.

Despite their all shortcomings, the Portuguese in Bengal never suffered from colour prejudices so common in the West. In order to establish an affinity between the Portuguese and their dependencies, the Portuguese since the time of Albuquerque tried to give to the people under their influence the Portuguese names, the Christian religion, the Portuguese dress and even the Portuguese blood. Intermarriages between the Portuguese and the Indians were strongly advocated by Albuquerque’s successors. As a matter of fact, a large number of the Portuguese settled in this land and married the Bengali women. Some of them accepted this province as their home and subsequently got mixed up with the local population. Of course there must have been illegitimate union between the Portuguese and the women of the land particularly during the declining years of the Portuguese when the Feringi pirates recognised no law nor principles of morality. However, marriages between the Portuguese and the Indians were very common and the converts were given Portuguese names. On the other hand, some of the Indians in the eastern regions adopted Portuguese names voluntarily. There are numerous communities of the Portuguese descendants all over Bengal. In the 18th century the community of the Portuguese descendants was a distinct one.<sup>3</sup> In the records of the English factories as well as in the accounts of the foreign travellers, they are called Portuguese.

<sup>1</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> Campos, *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

Although the Portuguese failed to make any distinctive contribution to Bengal's civilisation and culture, their influence can most remarkably be seen in our vocabulary. About 50 words have Contributions to language and literature found a permanent place in the spoken language of Bengal, e.g. 'Chabi', 'Balti', 'Saban', 'Alpin', 'Veranda', etc. For a long time, the Portuguese and the Bengalis came close to each other and hence many Portuguese words found currency in our language.

"The Portuguese language was, in the 17th and even in the 18th centuries, a lingua franca in Bengal. It was the medium of converse not only among the Portuguese and their descendants, but also among the Indians and later on among the English, the Dutch, the French and other settlers who came to Bengal."<sup>1</sup> The Persian language was in use only in the native courts. Summarising the important role of the Portuguese language played at one time in Bengal, Marshman writes: "Portuguese language came in with the Portuguese power two centuries and a half before and survived its extinction. It was the lingua franca of all foreign settlements and was the ordinary medium of conversation between the Europeans and their domestics. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

But the Portuguese did something more for the development of Bengal's prose literature. The first printed books in Bengali were printed at Lisbon in 1743. It was a Portuguese who composed the first Bengali prose work. It was another who compiled the first Bengali grammar and dictionary, "an achievement of no mean merit, an achievement of which any people might rightly feel proud". About 1599, Father Sosa translated into Bengali "a tractate of Christian religion in which were confuted the Gentile and Muhametah errors; to which was added a short catechisme by way of Dialogue which the children frequenting the schools learned by heard."<sup>3</sup> A converted landed aristocrat of east Bengal Dom Antonio do Rozario under Portuguese influence composed a dialogue, the first Bengali work of its kind that has come down to us.<sup>4</sup>

The Portuguese not only imported to India new kinds of merchandise, a new language and new creed, but also added very much to the flora of India and did much to improve the agricultural

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide, Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, Vol. X, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> Sen, *Brahman Roman Catholic Sambah*, introduction.

resources of the country of their adoption. Many of our common fruits and flowers were totally unknown before the Portuguese came. Even the common article of food—like potato  
 Contribution to agriculture was imported to India by the Portuguese from North America. From Brazil, they brought Cashew-nut which is cultivated on a large scale now-a-days in Midnapore district. Among the fruits that they brought to Bengal most noted are ‘papaya’, ‘kamranga’, ‘peyara’, ‘anarash’ (pineapple), ‘chinabadam’ (groundnut), ‘gach-marich’ (chillies), ‘kamlanebu’ (orange), ‘ranga-alu’ (sweet potato), etc.

To the credit of the Portuguese it is to be admitted that they explored all the river routes of Bengal, re-opened Bengal’s oceanic trade after ages, flooded Bengal market with various merchandise of foreign lands, created a class of Bengali middlemen in the field of trade and commerce, demonstrated the superiority of western methods of warfare and imparted naval training to the sailors of Bengal. In short, in many respects, they anticipated the activities of the English East India Company and “they may fairly claim that where Portugal led other European countries followed, where she sowed others reaped, where she laid the foundation others built a magnificent superstructure”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 370.

## CHAPTER 7

### MUGHAL-MAGH RELATIONS AND MAGH RAIDS IN BENGAL

Like the Portuguese pirates, the Maghs of Arrakan also constituted a great threat not only to the people of Lower Bengal but also to the Mughal government in Bengal for quite a long time. The Maghs were a symbol of terror and oppression to the common inhabitants in Bengal. From time to time, they carried out their depredations right into the heart of the country sometimes overwhelming the imperial opposition.

There is much controversy about the origin of the word Magh. According to the New Standard Dictionary published by the Statesman, the word 'Magh' is commonly applied to the inhabitants of Arrakan particularly those living near the district of Chittagong. Whether the word Magh is of Bengali origin is not precisely known. But with all certainty it can be said that the word is not a Burmese word. The authors of the book *Bengali Literature in Arrakan Court* have expressed the view that it is not proper to call the Mongoloid Arrakanese Magh and that the word Magh is derived from Magadh wherefrom their ancestors came. The Census Report of 1931 refers to the Maghs thus : "The term Magh is ordinarily applied to two distinct groups, viz. a Chittagonian Buddhist group and the Arrakan Maghs of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Chittagong. The Bengali speaking Chittagonian Maghs petitioned for the use of a distinct name. This caste claim themselves to Kshatriya status and they trace their descent from the Buddhists of Magadha who are alleged to have migrated from their old houses on the revival of Brahmanism and the advent of the Mughals. Risley has distinguished this as 'Marmagri Maghs' and the Arrakanese as 'Jumia, Roang and Rakhaing', but the group speaks Bengali and a Burmese description of this kind is not used among themselves and suggests of Burmese source." It is true that during the rule of the Senas in Bengal, thousands of Buddhists crossed over to Arrakan from Bengal. Hence it can be said with some amount of certainty that the royal house of Arrakan belonged to a different stock than the raiders who were given the name Magh as that of the ruling tribe of Arrakan.

“The application of the word”, writes J. M. Ghosh, “being restricted to inhabitants on Bengal border shows that the people living further away do not like to be called Maghs. On the other hand, the Arakan Maghs are akin to the Chittagong Maghs who have retained much of their characteristics even after migration to India.”<sup>1</sup>

**Arrakan described.** South of Tippera lay the territory of the king of Arrakan. It is now reduced to a small province of Burma lying to the north of Lower Burma. One side of it is enclosed by high hills which join the mountains of Kashmir or Garmsir. Another side is bordered by the sea. Deep rivers and the sea enclose the Western side which adjoins Bengal. The land and water routes alike for entering the country are very difficult. J. N. Sarkar writes: “The people (of Arakan) are called Maghs—which is an abbreviation of Mutamit-i-Sag (i.e. despicable dog); according to the proverb the name descends from ‘heaven’. They do not admit into this country other tribe than the Christians who visit it by sea-route for purpose of trade. . . . The inhabitants have no definite faith or religion but incline a little to the Hindu creed. . . . The Rajas of this country hold pre-eminence over other lower rulers. . . . These rajas are so proud and foolish that as the sun does not decline from the zenith, they do not put their heads out of the doors of their palaces for they say ‘The Sun is our younger brother; how can we hold court while he (Sun) is over our heads and we below him?’ In their decrees and letters they give themselves the title of ‘Elder brother of the sun, Lord of the Golden Horse and white Elephant’.”<sup>2</sup> Arrakan, now in Burma, is more a frontier province of Eastern India than a province of Burma because of its contiguity to Bengal and affinity to Bengal culture.

**Chittagong described.** Chittagong, the hilly tract lying midway between Bengal on the north-west and Arrakan on the south, was the stronghold of the Arrakanese. J. N. Sarkar writes: “From Jogdia (Noakhali district) where there was a Mughal outpost to Chatgaon lay a wilderness. On the skirt of the hills was a dense jungle without any vestige of habitation. The river Feni rising in the hill of Tippera, passes by Jogdia and falls into the ocean. Ninety-nine ‘nullahs’ which contain water even in seasons other than monsoons, intervene between Feni and Chatgaon. After the conquest of Chatgaon by Shaista Khan,

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Ghosh, *Magh Raiders in Bengal*.

<sup>2</sup> *Fathiya*, Eng. trans. by Sarkar, vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1907.

bridges were built over all these 'nullahs'. From Dacca to Chatgaon, six creeks have to be crossed in boats. . . . On the bank of the Karnafuli river, are some hills high and lower situated close to each other. All these hills have been. . . fortified and named the fort of Chatgaon. Fancy cannot sound the depth of its moat. In the fort, has been dug a deep ditch about 8 yards in breadth; on the eastern side, close to the edge of the ditch, flows the river Karnafuli which discords from Tippera hills to the sea. On the north side is a large, wide and deep tank close to the ditch. Behind the tank along the entire north side and a part of western side, are hills. The hills are so high and jungles are so dense that it is impossible to traverse them even in imagination. Within the fort two springs flow, the water of which runs into the Karnafuli river in the monsoons, when the channel of the springs becomes so broad that a 'jalía' boat can easily pass through it. On the other side of the Karnafuli there is a lofty and strong fort, opposite the fort of Chatgaon, it is full of defence materials. . . . Every year, the Raja of Arakan sends to Chatgaon a hundred ships full of soldiers and artillery munitions with a new 'Karamkari' (Commandant) when the former 'Karmakari', with the ships of the last year, returns to Arakan. The fort of Chatgaon was always put in the hands of Arakan King's relatives."<sup>1</sup>

**Mughal-Magh relations.** Long before the advent of the Mughals in Bengal, the latter had at one time close relation with Arrakan.

Early contracts  
between Bengal  
and Arrakan

During the hegemony of the Sena rulers of Bengal, many Buddhists, due to persecutions by the Hindus, migrated in large number from Bengal proper to Eastern Bengal specially east of the Meghna river.

This region was for a considerable time in the hands of Buddhist Princes. Hence the contact was both cultural and political. Maulvi Hamidullah in his *Tarikh-i-Chatgaon* has referred to shrines and Magh temples in this area.

Muslim contact with the region east of the Meghna river began for the first time when Mughisuddin Tughral, the Sultan of Bengal (1268-81 A.D.) intervened in the palace rivalry in Tippera. It is said that Ratna Fa, the founder of the present ruling house of Tippera sought the assistance of Tughral against his rival brother Raja Fa. Accordingly, Tughral marched upon Tippera, placed Ratna Fa on the throne and conferred on him the title of 'Manik'. As a price of inter-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

vention, Tughral was allowed to build up a fortress in that region which was called 'the Fort of Tughral' (about 25 miles south of Dacca). Thus the Muslims got a foothold on the east of the Meghna. In 1430 A.D. the Islamised son of Raja Ganesh, Jalaluddin extended his kingdom upto Chittagong and to commemorate this achievements Sultan Jalaluddin issued coins from Chittagong. Perhaps it was after the discomfiture of Raja Mahendra Dev of Chandradwip that the seizure of Chittagong by Jalaluddin was made possible. The Muslim Kingdom of Bengal once again came into contact with the Arrakanese during the reign of Alauddin Husain Shah. According to Tippera chronicle, the 'Rajmala', during the war between the Hindu king of Tippera Dhanya Manikya and the Sultan of Bengal, Alauddin Husain Shah, the former took possession of Chittagong. But very soon, taking advantage of Husain Shah's fourth expedition against Tippera, the Arrakanese king occupied Chittagong. It was evidently to deal with this Arrakanese aggression that Husain Shah sent an army under the crown prince Nasrat Shah "to whom local traditions of Chittagong ascribe the first Muslim conquest of the district". Military operations against the king of Arrakan continued for some years even after Nasrat's return. On the latter's return, Paragal Khan was appointed the military ruler of Chittagong. From the Muslim headquarters on the bank of the river Feni, Paragal and after him, his son Chhuti steadily pushed the Arrakanese southwards and also maintained a careful watch over the movements of the king of Tippera. Hamidullah in his *Ahadis-ul-Khawanin* writes: "A rich Arab merchant named Alfa Husaini is stated to have helped the king of Gaur in the conquest of Chittagong with ships and money." The Portuguese emissary Joao de Silveira when landed at Chittagong, found the port in the possession of 'the king of Bengala'. Another Portuguese De Barros confirms that by 1517 the king of Arrakan was a vassal of the king of Bengal. Hence it can be safely said that before the advent of the Mughals in Bengal, Chittagong came into the possession of the Muslim rulers of Bengal and thereby the two races—the Muslims and the Maghs came into contact with each other.

But during the intervening period between the fall of the Turko-Afghan rule in Bengal and the effective establishment of the Mughal hegemony over the province, the Arrakanese grew very powerful and reconquered Chittagong from the hands of the Muslims. The rulers of Arrakan took advantage of the internal troubles and political uncertainty following the nominal conquest of Bengal by the Mughal



emperor Akbar to expand their influence and domination over a large area of south-eastern Bengal. The Arrakan king Sikandar Shah (Meng Phalaung—1571-1593) established his undisputed sway over the whole of Chittagong and brought a large portion of Noakhali and Tippera under his sway. His son Salim Shah (Meng Radzagni—1593-1612) was equally ambitious and capable. His son Husain Shah (Meng Khamaung—1612-1622) proved to be the greatest and most successful conqueror. The two latter kings of Arrakan led a series of campaigns against Bengal and by their policy of open war and secret help to the malcontents and rebels in Bengal, proved to be a great menace to the Mughal peace and a challenge to Mughal authority in Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

The kings of Arrakan themselves were fierce fighters and had an immense army during the 16th and 17th centuries. The *Baharistan*, the *Fathiya* and Bernier's *Travels* all testify to the Prowess of the Arrakan kings spacious country, political pre-eminence, great splendour and immense forces of the Arrakan kings. According to the *Baharistan*, the Arrakan king possessed one million infantry, 1500 elephants and 10 thousand war-boats. While the author of the *Fathiya* (continuation) says "their (Magh Kings) cannons are beyond numbering, their floatilla exceeds the waves of the sea (in number)". The Magh fleet was more formidable than the Mughal 'Nawara' as has been put by Shihabuddin Talish, "whenever 100 ships of Bengal sighted four of the enemy, if the distance separating them was great, then the Bengal fleet showed fight by flight, considered it a great victory that they had carried off their lives in safety and became famous in Bengal for their valour and heroism. If the interval was small and the enemy overpowered them, the men of the Bengal ships-rowers, sepoys and armed men alike—threw themselves without delay into the water, preferring drowning to captivity".<sup>2</sup> Talish further adds: "In no other part of the Mughal empire, has any neighbouring infedal (king) power to oppress the Muslims, but rather do the infedal (king) show all kinds of submission and humility in order to save their homes and lands and the Mughal officers of those places engage in making new acquisitions by conquest. In Bengal alone the opposite is the case; here the mere preservation of the imperial domain is considered a great boon. Those governors in whose times

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1907.

the piracies were less frequent, congratulated themselves.”<sup>1</sup> The passage quoted above shows to what extent the Arrakanese created terror in the ruling circle in Bengal on the one hand and the weakness of the Mughal fleet against the Magh fleet on the other. The Maghs became more formidable when allied by the Feringi pirates.

The Mughals had to wage severe and prolonged warfare with the Arrakanese of which only the beginning lie in the reign of Jahangir.

Magh invasion, 1612 While Islam Khan, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal was engaged in fighting the independent chiefs of eastern Bengal, the Arrakanese made an incursion into Bengal frontier in the east which fortunately did not

assume serious proportion and lasted only for a short while. Taking advantage of the withdrawal of the imperial troops from the frontier thanas of Sripur and Vikrampur in the south and that of Bhulua in the east, the Arrakanese launched two attacks on those thanas with 300 war-boats. The thanadars of those places failed to resist the Arrakanese due to their paucity of troops and war-boats. The Arrakanese carried on their plundering activities with impunity, looting and burning a good many villages and hamlets and carrying away a large number of captives. A relieving force was sent by Islam Khan, but before it could reach the spots, the Arrakanese went off safely leaving behind a trail of devastations.

During the viceroyalty of Qasim Khan, the Maghs and the Feringis, patching up their differences temporarily, made a combined attack

Magh invasion, 1614-15 upon the frontier thana of Bhulua under the Arrakan king Meng Khamaung (Husain Shah) and the Portuguese freebooter Gonzales. The invading army

was consisted of 80,000 infantry (most of whom were musketeers, only 10,000 being paiks: according to the *Baharistan* it was composed of 300,000 in all), and 700 war-elephants. The land army was under the command of the Arrakan king, while the combined Magh-Feringi fleet consisting of ‘ghurabs’ (floating batteries), ‘jaliyas’, ‘Kusas’, ‘muchwas’, etc. was placed under the command of Gonzales. The absence of the Mughal thanadar of Bhulua, Abdul Wahid, gave the enemy the opportunity. Upon the news of the rapid progress of the Arrakanese towards Bhulua, Qasim Khan was roused to action. He encamped at Khizrpur and prepared to transport the Mughal reinforcement across the Meghna and other rivers by cargo boats and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

at the same time instructed the neighbouring thanadars to assemble their troops. Abdul Wahid, ignoring his son's advice to oppose the enemy, not only left Bhulua to its fate but also retreated towards north. The viceroy instructed Abdul Wahid to make a bold stand against the the Maghs at the strategic point of the Dakatia river.<sup>1</sup> But the feeble thanadar instead of doing that, retired still further into the narrow stream of the Mechwa Khal which the war-boats of the enemy like 'ghurabs', 'Kusas' and 'jaliyas' would not be able to enter. Hence the field lay open to the invaders. The Maghs and the Feringis carried on depredations and wrought havoc in the entire region. The land force of the Arrakanese crossed the Big Feni and the little Feni rivers, occupied Bhulua and plundered the inland territories with impunity. The enemy fleet proceeded up the Meghna to the Dakatia river carrying on depredations on the regions lying on both the banks.<sup>2</sup> When everything seemed to be lost on the Mughal side, an unfortunate incident occurred which turned the tide of fortune in favour of the Mughals. The loose alliance between the Maghs and the Feringis broke down. The Arrakan king treacherously imprisoned a Feringi general and other Feringi officers with a view to coercing them into submission. The Arrakan king calculated within himself thus, "when the most dear relation of Carvalho (the imprisoned general was Carvalho's nephew) has fallen into my hands, he will no more create any disturbance and I need have no further anxiety on the score of his fleet".<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, upon the appraisal of this outrage of the Arrakan king, the Feringis took severe reprisals. The entire Magh boats were plundered and a number of Magh naval officers and sailors were made captives and the Feringis sailed for Sondwip leaving the Arrakan king to his fate. The miserable plight of the Arrakanese at that juncture encouraged Abdul Wahid. He crossed the Dakatia canal and rushed upon the fort which was in front of the enemy. The Arrakanese, failing to withstand the assault of the Mughals, left the fort and took to flight. Thus the invasion of the Arrakanese ended in disastrous failure.<sup>3</sup>

The Magh king Meng Khamaung did not lose heart and made another attack upon Bengal. He patched up a truce with the king of Burma after the retirement of Gonzales and his followers, to Sondwip. Mirza Nathan writes, "when the Magh Raja suffered a heavy defeat and returned to Rakhang (Arakan) leaving the fleet,

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 335.

the land force and the elephants and many booties in a chaotic condition, he suffered mortification and began to prepare himself for an attempt to compensate the loss.

Magh invasion, Thus he kept himself constantly engaged in this  
1615 preparation".<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile being apprised by his

secret agents that the Mughal regiments which came to the aid of Abdul Wahid, had all returned, the Arrakan king at the head of a large army once again fell upon Bhulua. The Mughal thanadar, instead of facing the invaders, again evacuated his post and took refuge in the Dakatia river. The Mughal viceroy Qasim Khan again came to Khizrpur at the confluence of the rivers Dulai and Lakhiya. He threw a bridge over the river and despatched Abd-un-Nabi to the aid of Abdul Wahid with a contingent of two thousand cavalry, three thousand musketeers, seven hundred war-boats and one hundred elephants. Once more the Arrakan king occupied the whole of Bhulua unopposed and gave a hot chase to the fleeing imperialists. But Mirza Nuruddin, the son of Abdul Wahid and some other brave officers made a counter-charge upon the Maghs. Again fate came to the rescue of the Mughals. It so happened that there was a large bog near the place of the encounter and the pursuing Maghs fell into it. A few of the Maghs however managed to cross it, but the Magh king himself got stuck up in the bog where he was instantly surrounded by the Mughals. A large number of the Maghs were killed and many were captured alive. According to Mirza Nathan, about 500 men of the enemy were killed and about double this number fled away wounded and half-dead. During the whole night, the imperial soldiers and officers remained watchful so that not a single soul of them could come out of the bog.<sup>2</sup>

The Mughal thanadar Abdul Wahid sent a message to the Magh king thus: "We had no quarrel with you. We took possession of the territory of Bhulua by attacking Raja Ananta Manik of Bhulua and we do not encroach upon your territory. Since the beginning of the rule of the late Islam Khan, this is the fourth time that you have invaded us and every time you have received punishment for your actions. You became impatient again and did not fail in organising a raid. . . ."<sup>3</sup> The Arrakan king was doubtless, put to a miserable plight and hence he had no other alternative than to sue for an ignomi-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide, Ibid.*, p. 385.

ous peace. He appealed to the Mughal thanadar thus, "you are older in years than me. So I consider you as my father. As long as I live, I shall consider myself as a person purchased by you with the gold of your generosity, kindness and favour. So consider me as you son and release me. . . ."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Arrakan king, in return for his personal liberty, agreed to surrender all his officers including his nephew, and his men and elephants and other equipments. The Mughal thanadar agreed to these terms and the Arrakan king was allowed to escape to Chittagong at night. After collecting the Magh war-equipments and deserted officers and men, Abdul Wahid returned triumphantly to Bhulua.

After the disastrous failure of the Arrakanese invasion of Bhulua in January 1616, the Mughal viceroy Qasim Khan launched an aggressive expedition against the Arrakan king with a view to wrest Chittagong from the Magh hands..

Mughal invasion of Chittagong, 1616

It was the repeated instruction of emperor Jahangir "to conquer Arakan, to seize the white elephant and to send it to the sublime court". The viceroy himself advanced to Bhulua in February 1616 wherefrom he despatched Abd-un-Nabi with a force of 5000 cavalry, 5000 musketeers, 200 war-elephants and a fleet of 100 war-boats in the direction of Chittagong. Qasim Khan with a large army, remained encamped on the bank of the river Feni in order to encourage the army of the vanguard.

While the imperial army had been steadily proceeding towards Chittagong, the Arrakan king was not sitting idle. He made necessary arrangements for defence. He decided to check the advance of the imperial army. Notwithstanding the fact that the fort of Chittagong was well fortified and equipped, the Arrakan king sent his 'Karamkari' with a hundred thousand infantry, one thousand war-boats and four hundred elephants to a place called Kathgar, a strategic point 20 miles north-west of Chittagong. The king himself started from his capital Merohaung for the defence of the fort of Chittagong with an army of 300,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry besides a large number of war-boats.

Informed by the spies that the fortification at Kathgar was not yet complete and the Arrakan king had not yet arrived at Chittagong with his main force, the Mughal commander of the vanguard Abd-un-Nabi, with the expectation of an easy victory, marched forward without

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 386.

delay. He left behind Sarhad Khan and Shaikh Kamal to erect a fort and hold it for the purpose of maintaining communication with the advancing army. The latter two generals were displeased on being made subordinate to Abd-un-Nabi. So taking advantage of their knowledge of the routes, they left the high way and following a short cut way, they reached Kathgar and without delay made an assault on the Magh fort. The Maghs offered stiff resistance and discharged cannon, guns, arrows upon the invaders. Many soldiers on both sides were killed and wounded. The victory on the Mughal side was almost certain. But some of the 'mansabdars' in collusion with Sarhad Khan did not desire a complete victory at that stage and under the plea of the approach of night, they proposed suspension of the hostilities till next morning. Abd-un-Nabi, an inexperienced man could not read through their plea and hence suspended the hostilities accordingly.<sup>1</sup> And thereby the imperialists made a great mistake. While the assault was resumed next morning, the situation was completely changed. The Maghs within the fort of Kathgar meanwhile had recovered from the shock of the surprise attack and offered a determined resistance. The Mughals fought till mid-day and when they found it impossible to storm the Magh fort, they made a division of the trenches and proposed to keep the fort in the centre and surround it. But as there was a high hill on one side of the fort, it was impossible to surround it and hence the siege was protracted. The Magh 'Karamkari' ordered ten thousand Maghs to raise a strong stockade between the hills in the rear of the Mughal vanguard and in front of the camp of Sarhad Khan and Shaikh Kamal who had fallen behind for the purpose of bringing ration for the troops. Accordingly the Maghs raised a stockade and put the people who carried on communication, between the two divisions of the imperial army, into great difficulty. The besiegers themselves were soon reduced to the position of the besieged. Ultimately, the possibility of the food supply to the main army being threatened, the imperialists raised the siege and retreated towards Dacca leaving behind their heavy artillery and destroying about 500 maunds of gun-powder (May, 1616).<sup>2</sup>

Thus the maiden attempt of the Mughals to conquer Chittagong ended in a complete failure.

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, pp. 406-407.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 405-407.

During the viceroyalty of Ibrahim Khan (1617-1623) the Arrakan king Meng Khamaung (Husain Shah) launched another expedition.

Magh invasion, 1620  
 by conquering Sondwip from the possession of Sebastian Gonzales. The Arrakan king, with a fleet of 700 'ghurabs' and 4000 'jalia' boats, made a surprise attack upon the villages along the bank of the river Meghna. As there was no opposition, the Maghs plundered the villages with impunity and advanced as far as the island of Baghchar threatening the city of Dacca. Upon the appraisal of the Magh advance, Ibrahim Khan collected 32 war-boats and advanced towards the scene, reaching the vicinity of the enemy camp with a few personal attendants. The rest of the Mughal 'mansabdars' and the landlords of Bengal joined the viceroy afterwards with a force of 8000 cavalry and about 5000 war-boats.

The promptness of the viceroy and his personal courage saved the situation. The Arrakan king got frightened and did not venture a fighting with the imperialists. He made a hasty retreat leaving 1000 war-boats for the defence of his frontier. The viceroy after making necessary arrangements for the defence of the frontier thanas and putting additional garrisons in them, returned to Dacca in the month of October, 1620.

Repeated incursions of the Maghs made the emperor Jahangir very much concerned about the security of the Mughal territories.

Mughal invasion of Chittagong, 1621  
 in conquering Chittagong made the emperor disgusted and he was looking forward for an opportunity to "teach the Magh a lesson".

After the conquest of Tippera, the emperor ordered Ibrahim Khan to punish Arrakan king. Accordingly, a few months after the Magh invasion, Ibrahim Khan fitted out an expedition against the Arrakan king with Chittagong as his objective (March, 1621). Tippera was made the advance base. Although the route was more direct, it lay through a hilly region covered with dense forest. Hence there was extreme difficulty in regard to transport and food supply. The choice of land-route was a great mistake which was ultimately responsible for the failure of the project. From Tippera up to the mouth of the Big Feni river, the land force and navy proceeded supporting each other. But after the arrival of both the wings of the imperial army at the mouth of the Big Feni river, the viceroy left the 'nawara' in the Feni river, proceeded with

the land army towards Chittagong. The march through the forests caused unspeakable hardship to the soldiers. It became well-nigh impossible for the army to march any further. The army lost complete touch with the fleet. Scarcity of food and pestilence in the imperial camp and clamour of the troops for hasty retreat, at last compelled the viceroy to retrace his steps, "with the ranks much depleted and the morale of the army much shaken". Thus the second attempt to conquer Chittagong failed also miserably.<sup>1</sup>

The Mughal disaster exposed the weakness of the provincial government to the Arrakanese and encouraged them again to indulge in repeated raids into Bengal. During the monsoons (August, 1621), the Arrakan king made another daring raids into the frontier villages in Dakhin Shahbazpur. Ibrahim Khan took prompt action. He left Dacca with a fleet of about 5000 war-boats and arrived at Vikrampur where the 'mansabdars' and other Mughal officers gathered together with their forces. But the crisis passed off without any encounter as the Arrakan king had to retrace his steps hurriedly in order to meet the Burmese aggression upon the frontier of the Arrakan kingdom. The Mughal viceroy leaving a fleet of 600 war-boats under the charge of Mirza Baqi to keep watch over the movements of the Maghs along the Meghna river, came back to the capital.

When prince Shah Jahan rebelled against his father in Bengal, the king of Arrakan took this opportunity to come to an understanding with the former. A friendly mission from the Arrakan king Jhiri Thudhamma (son of Meng Khamaung) came to Bengal. The rebel prince valued the assistance of the Maghs in his war against the Delhi emperor. In fact, common hostility to the emperor brought them together and Shah Jahan reciprocated the friendly gesture of the Arrakan king. "No tangible result, however, followed and the whole thing proved more than a diplomatic game."<sup>2</sup> But the Arrakan king did not miss the opportunity. Taking advantage of the rebel prince's preoccupations, the Arrakan king made an invasion upon Bhulua. The Mughal commander Mirza Baqi with 700 cavalry and 300 war-boats failed to resist the invaders who carried on their depredations with impunity and went back with enormous booty.

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II.*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.



Taking advantage of the confusion that prevailed in the Mughal camp during the incumbency of Khan Zaman Khan, the son and deputy of Mahabat Khan in Bengal, the Arrakan king marched unopposed to Khizrpur and thence along the Dulai to Dacca where he entered, burnt and plundered and then returned with numerous captives.<sup>1</sup>

Dacca plundered  
by the Maghs,  
1626

This was the last Magh raid in Bengal in the reign of Jahangir. The ease with which the Maghs carried on depredations and plundered the capital city of Dacca shows how the Mughal administration in Bengal deteriorated towards the close of Jahangir's reign. Referring to the repeated failures of the Mughal government against the Maghs, Shihabuddin Talish has remarked that "fighting requires bravery and is not the business of Mullas and Hakims".<sup>1</sup>

On the arrival of Mir Jumla in Bengal, the Arrakan king sent an envoy to the viceroy with a haughty letter demanding the restoration of some of his territories which, according to the Arrakan king's opinion, had been forcibly seized by the Mughals. Mir Jumla dismissed the the Magh envoy with a courteous reply and a small present.

Emperor Aurangzeb in his farman appointing Mir Jumla viceroy of Bengal in 1660, had commissioned him to conquer Arrakan. The emperor considered the punishment of the Maghs as an urgent duty for safeguarding the interests of religion and brotherhood in Islam. But Mir Jumla secured the emperor's permission to postpone the Arrakan campaign for the time-being in order to lead an expedition against Kuch Bihar and Assam.

**Conquest of Chittagong.** Since the close of Jahangir's reign, no serious effort was made by the Mughal government to put an end to the Magh depredations by conquering Chittagong, 'the nest of the pirates'. It was the Bengal viceroy Shaista Khan who fitted out an expedition against the Maghs which ultimately succeeded in conquering Chittagong in the year 1666.

At first the prospect appeared absolutely hopeless, because the Maghs had a record of a long and unbroken course of victories to their credit, while the Bengal troops and the sailors were utterly terrified and the Mughal flotilla in Bengal had been woefully depleted by Prince Shuja's negligence and Mir Jumla's disastrous Assam campaign in 1663. It was proved in the earlier expeditions against

Shaista Khan  
built up a new  
navy

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

Arrakan that without a powerful navy well supported by a land army, the conquest of Chittagong was well-nigh impossible. After Mir Jumla's Assam campaigns in 1663 the Mughal 'nawara' decayed and "the name alone remained in Bengal".<sup>1</sup> Most of the naval officers and expert mariners perished in that campaigns and only a few worn-out boats of the grand Mughal flotilla remained. In a word, the Mughal fleet was no more in existence. But Shaista Khan's determination and tactfulness overcame every obstacle. He made strenuous efforts to revive the navy and planned out a grand naval strategy for the conquest of Chittagong. While at Rajmahal, the viceroy sent urgent orders to Muhammad Beg (the 'darogah' of the nawara) to build up a flotilla afresh, appointed at the latter's suggestion Qazi Samu as 'mushraff of the nawara' and sent them back to Dacca. As timber and ship wrights were required for repairing and constructing the ships, to every 'mouza' of the province that had timber and carpenters, bailiffs were sent with warrants to bring them to Dacca. Orders were issued to the imperial officers posted at different places to construct as many boats as possible at the ports of Hughly, Chilmari, Karibari and Balasore and to send them to Dacca.

Shaista Khan also approached the Dutch for the supply of their boats to the imperial fleet. He posted Ziauddin Yusuf with a few war-boats at Laricol near Dacca. Yusuf was ordered to exert pressure on the Portuguese merchants of Laricol to "write to their brethren, the pirates of Chittagong, offering assurances and hopes of imperial favours and rewards and thus make them come and enter the Mughal service".<sup>2</sup> In December 1664, Shaista Khan arrived at Dacca and at once devoted all his energy to the rebuilding of the fleet and organising the naval expedition to Chittagong. A new navy was created, manned and equipped in a little over a year. "In the great duckyards that lined the channel passing through the city of Dacca in the quarter known as Tanti bazar boats were built in large numbers."<sup>3</sup>

Having revived the flotilla and put the naval force in war-trim, Shaista Khan next set himself to secure suitable naval bases for the impending expedition. Sangramgarh, an outpost of the Mughals at the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, provided a most suitable naval base. The viceroy ordered Muhammad Shariff, the faujdar of Hughly, to go to Sangramgarh with many men, officers

<sup>1</sup> *Fathiya*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 379.

and guns and to build a naval fort there. Abdul Hasan was posted there with 200 war-boats to patrol over the river and to keep watch over the movements of the pirates. Muhammad Beg with 100 war-boats was stationed at Dhapa with a view to reinforce Abdul Hasan in times of emergency. Having stationed war-ships at two strategic posts, the next plan of the campaign was the seizure of the island of Sondwip only six hour's sail from Chittagong. Sondwip formed an excellent naval base. In November 1665, a naval expedition under the Admiral Ibn Husain seized Sondwip after defeating Dilwar, a runaway captain of the Mughal flotilla. At this stage, a section of the Feringis of Chittagong under their leader captain Moore deserted to the Mughal side. Quite a large number of them escaped from Chittagong with their families and 42 'jalia' boats and joined the Mughal commandant at Noakhali. They were immediately impressed into imperial service and captain Moore was offered a bounty of Rs. 2,000 and a monthly salary of Rs. 500.<sup>1</sup> The Feringi captain

Plan for operation

urged an immediate attack upon Chittagong before the Arrakan king could recover from the shock of the desertion of the Feringis as well as could get time to bring up reinforcements from Arrakan. The plan of the campaign was that the fleet under Ibn Husain should creep along the coast, while the land army under Buzrug Ummad Khan should march parallel to it each supporting the other. The Feringis with 40 war-ships of their own should act as auxiliaries. Truly speaking, the Feringis had to bear the brunt of the fight on sea. It was further decided that a number of heavy war-boats should remain anchored at Noakhali as reserves, and the main fleet while leaving Sondwip for Chittagong, should leave a few swift-moving 'kushas' there for the transport of the soldiers in case of emergency. In fact, Noakhali and Sondwip were used as bases for feeding the expeditionary naval array.<sup>2</sup> Ibn Husain was ordered to advance with the fleet by the sea and Farhad Khan and Mir Murṭaza were ordered to proceed by land in aid of the fleet. "The flotilla was to advance by sea and Buzrug Ummad Khan by its coast; in march and halt the land and sea forces were never to be separated."

On 14 January 1666 the Mughal army crossing the river Feni entered the Arrakanese territory. The fleet entered the Kumiria creek only two marches short of Chittagong. Farhad Khan and Mir

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Chittagong District Gazetteer.*

Murtaza advanced by land to cooperate with the fleet. Ten 'ghurabs' and 45 'jalias' of the Maghs came in sight and began discharging guns. Captain Moore and other Feringis who were leading the Mughal van, boldly steered their ships up to the enemy. Ibn Husain was coming behind them. The Maghs failing to resist, took to flight leaving their boats. But the advancing Mughal fleet was stopped by the main Magh fleet which had come out of the Hurla creek. The Magh boats were arranged in two rows—the first row was composed of light boats and the second was composed of heavy 'ghurabs' furnished with heavy cannon. The sight of the Magh fleet extremely frightened the sailors of the imperial fleet. But Ibn Husain encouraged the crew saying, "now that the fugitive 'jalhas' have joined the larger fleet, the enemy have surely been seized with terror. It behoves us as brave men not to give the enemy time nor let the opportunity slip out of our grasp but to attack them. . . ." Arriving before the Magh fleet, Ibn Husain felt that to run his small ship against the enemy's bigger ones was to court sure defeat.

So he decided to anchor in front of the enemy fleet and indulged in firing till the arrival of his larger ships. Those ships arrived in the evening of 23 January. From that time to dawn there was cannonading between the two sides.<sup>1</sup>

According to *Alamgirnamah*, "After first naval battle with the enemy fleet, Ibn Husain with his light and swift ships gave a chase and captured 10 'ghurabs' and 3 'jalhas'. Soon afterwards, the larger ships of the enemy came in sight for a second time, fought a long battle and at sun set fled from the scene. Ibn Husain pursued them but as the enemy's ships entered the Karnafuli river and his larger ships had not come up with him, he thought it advisable to withdraw his fleet to a suitable place and pass the night in keeping watch."

Next morning (24 January) the imperialists "flying their victorious banner, beating their drums and sounding their bugles and trumpets advanced towards the enemy firing guns. . . . The enemy got frightened and turned the heads of their larger ships away from the imperialists, attached their 'jalias' to them and began to tow-back big ships, fighting during their flight".<sup>2</sup> The Magh fleet retreated into the Karnafuli river where they drew up their ships in line between the town of Chittagong and an island in the midstream. As soon as the imperial fleet entered the mouth of the Karnafuli river, the Maghs opened

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<sup>1</sup> *Fathiya*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

fire. Ibn Husain sent most of the ships up the river and many of the soldiers by the bank and attacked the Maghs. Fire was opened upon the Mughals from the Chittagong fort. A great battle was fought both on the land and water.

After a stiff fighting, the Maghs courted defeat; some of their sailors jumped over-board and some surrendered. Many of the enemy's boats were sunk while the rest 135 in number were captured. On 25 November, the fort of Chittagong was besieged and bombarded. Towards the evening, the Magh garrison surrendered to Ibn Husain. On 27 November, the imperial Commander-in-Chief Buzrug Ummad Khan made a triumphal entry into the fort of Chittagong.

Munawar Khan and his followers plundered the fort and set fire to the houses and burnt down much of the town and its property.

Enormous booty fell into the hands of the imperialists.

Enormous booty seized They seized 3 elephants, 1026 pieces of big and small cannon, many match-locks and plenty of ammunition.

Two thousand Maghs were taken captive and sold as slaves. "But the glorious fruit of the campaign was the release and restoration to home of many thousand Bengali peasants who had been kidnapped before by the pirates and held here in serfdom."<sup>1</sup> The conquered city was entrusted to a Mughal faujdar and its name was changed to Ialamabad.

Thus after two naval encounters the nest of the pirates broke down which had long terrorised the waterways of the Bengal delta. It was the superior naval strategy and a naval force ably supported by a land army that ultimately accounted for the success of the Mughals.<sup>2</sup>

### *Nature of the Magh Raids and their Effects*

From the second decade of the 17th century the Magh-Feringi pirates constituted a serious menace to Mughal peace and Mughal rule in Bengal till 1666. The Maghs were a race of competent seamen cruel like the Feringis and lived a similar piratical life. "When Chittagong fell into the Magh hands, they increased the desolation of the entire region between Chittagong and Jogdia and closed the road so well that even wind could not pass through."<sup>3</sup> South-eastern

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Roy, *Naval Battles of Chittagong*, vide, *Hindusthan Standard*—Dec. 3, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> *Fathiya*.

Bengal woven as it is by a net work of rivers and rivulets offered the sea-faring people like the Maghs the greatest scope for their instinct of adventure. They practically lived on the sea, flourished on the sea and hence acquired great skill in naval art. "They lived in boats with their families and like nomads sailed from place to place like the Feringis." The *Baharistan* the *Fathiya* (Cont) and Bernier's *Travels*—all testify to the spacious country, the political pre-eminence and a large naval force of the Arrakan kings. According to the *Baharistan*, the Arrakan king possessed ten thousand war-boats, besides infantry and elephants. Most of their ships were 'ghurabs', and 'jalias', 'khalus' and 'Dhuma'. Besides in the Magh navy there were big and small 'kartus' fitted with guns. These were light rowing boats 60 to 80 ft. long used in sea-fights. There were also 'jahandars' and 'kushas' suitable for fighting in channels and lakes.<sup>1</sup> The 'ghurabs', 'Dhums' and 'jalias' usually carried heavy loads like soldiers and war-equipments, while the 'kartus' and 'jahandars' carried provisions. "It is a most suprising thing", says Tavernier, "to see with what speed these galleys are propelled by oars. Some of them are so long that they have upto 50 oars on each side, but there are not more than 2 men to each oar. You see some which are much decorated where the gold and azure have not been spared."<sup>2</sup> The rafts were often used by the Maghs in transporting goods and merchandise. Most of the war-boats were well equipped and armed with guns. Besides the trained Magh sailors, the Arrakan king impressed into his service the Portuguese and Dutch admirals and gunners, who were allowed a share of the booty. Land was assigned to the Feringis for their maintenance.<sup>3</sup> In addition to boats furnished with guns, a few boats with magazine called 'floating batteries' always accompanied the Magh flotilla. The naval strength of the Maghs was considerably augmented by the active assistance of the Feringis. With their help, the Arrakan kings built vessels and prepared powder and cannon. In times of expedition, the war-boats were arranged according to size and load and the fleet was placed in charge of a 'Karamkari' (commandant), without whose signal the fleet could not move and generally a 'Bengala cane' says Manrique, served the purpose of signal as fire shot was the signal of the Feringis. Each fleet had a captain-pilot

<sup>1</sup> Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma*, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Eastern Ballads*, IV, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Bernier, *Travels*, p. 175.

called 'Mirda' and over the entire fleet there was the 'Karamkari'. Besides, the Arrakan kings possessed a number of pleasure-boats "with halls, drawing rooms, galleries and anti-chambers, the whole divided into several compartments for the royal family. All the apartments were worked with such neatness and beauty that for floating pleasure houses it must be considered truly magnificent".<sup>1</sup> In these pleasure boats the Arrakan kings usually spent two summer months giving audience and discharging state business.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles have left us a vivid description of the atrocity, murder and rapine of the Danes and other raiders during their invasions of England. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Maratha raiders commonly known as 'Bargis' caused unspeakable miseries to the people of Bengal for a quite a long time. Poet Gangaram of Mymensingh, who was an eye-witness of the Maratha ravages in Bengal, has left us a vivid description of those atrocities in his book *Maharashtra-purana*. Like the 'Bagris' in the 18th century, the Maghs throughout the 17th century caused much horror and paralysed life in the coastal regions of Bengal. The ruthless cruelties and merciless atrocities of the Maghs in Bengal can be explained by the fact that "though the Maghs are now Bhuddhists, they admit that they were once head-hunters. . . . They say that when the heads were brought in, they were welcomed by women and were then burned".<sup>2</sup> Many flourishing regions along the coast lay desolate and became unfit for habitation due to the depredations and atrocities of the Maghs which became almost chronic. Referring to the activities of the pirates, Talish writes: "The Arakan pirates, both Maghs and Ferringis used constantly to plunder Bengal. They carried off the Hindus and Muslims they could seize, pierced the palms of their hands, passed thin strips of cane through the holes and threw the men huddled together under the decks of their ships. . . ." The frequency, severity and ruthlessness of their filibustering activities, damage and desolation caused by them and their unspeakable cruelties on their captives, all combined to make them an object of great terror and hatred to the people of Bengal. As Talish writes: "The Maghs did not leave a bird in the air or a beast on the land (from Chittagong) to Jogdia, the frontier of Bengal. . . . Not a householder was left on both the sides of the rivers on their track from Dacca to Chittagong. The prosperous district of Bakla (Bakergunj) was swept clean with broom of plunder

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Mills, *Notes on a Tour in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1926*.

and kidnapping so that none was left to occupy any house to kindle a light in that region.”<sup>1</sup> Bernier, who travelled in the latter part of the 17th century writes: “Many of the isles (in the middle of the Ganges) that were next to sea had been abandoned on account of the ravages of the Portuguese pirates and had at that time no other inhabitants than tigers and gazelles and hogs and poultry grown wild.” The *Eastern Ballads* contain numerous stories regarding atrocities of the Maghs whose main object, amongst others was to kidnap young Bengali girls.

The raids and ravages of the Maghs almost paralysed the normal avocation of life. In the Hughly river, no one ventured to go down the stream below the Magh fort which was situated near the Sibpore Botanical Garden. Life almost came to a standstill in the coastal region where the people could not kindle light or fire for preparing food lest the sea-rovers might detect human habitation therefrom. For fear of the raiders, ladies even did not dare to put a light at the sacred ‘Tulsi Mancha’. Bathing in the river was almost given up. The village Magtola near Mymensingh town bears testimony to the wide-spread depredations of the Maghs. In the district of Tippera relics of Magh settlements still exist. “Tanks long from east to west instead of from north to south are called ‘Magher Dighi’ are not uncommon in the centre of south of the district. A few Magh remains and such names as ‘Pokan’ and ‘Dengu’ are theirs.”<sup>2</sup> Centuries of plunders and raids carried on the Maghs seriously affected social and economic life of Bengal. Rural life and along with it rural trade and commerce became silent and from the English factory records it appears that the trading activities of the English factory at Dacca came to a standstill as “it suffered greatly from the depredation of the Maghs, and it was with great difficulty that the Dacca factory could procure food for bare subsistence; so terrorised were the people that owing to the incursion of the Maghs that they could not stir out of their houses and bring supplies, not to speak of carrying on their daily avocation.”<sup>3</sup>

Manrique has referred to the enslavement of the Bengali peasants by the Maghs as he says: “After purchasing slaves from the Maghs either at Dianga or Pipli in Orissa, the slaves were taken in ships for sale, tied together through holes in their palms and sustained by a daily allowance of dry rice thrown to them carelessly as to birds.”

<sup>1</sup> *Fathiya*.

<sup>2</sup> *Tippera District Settlement*.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Court of Directors, 27 January, 1749*.



The *Noakhali District Gazetteer* contains horrible stories of the atrocities committed by the Maghs. "Many are the tales told of the fierceness and cruelty of the robbers and how the whole countryside would tremble at the cry of 'the Magh,' 'the Magh', that told of their approach. Surprising the villagers in their homes or at the markets they would carry off men, women and children, holding some to ransom and keeping the rest as slaves either to sell them to the Portuguese of Goa or Ceylon and other places or forcibly converting them to Christianity to train them up as rowers in their own service."<sup>1</sup> Women were sometimes sold for marriage in other parts of Bengal where it was difficult to secure brides in those days. These women were called 'Bharer Meye'.

#### *Measures taken by the Mughals against the Maghs*

Doubtless, for centuries the Maghs constituted a great threat to Mughal peace in Bengal. The naval superiority of the Maghs and their close association with another sea-faring race, the Portuguese sea-rovers accounted much for their successful raids in the coastal region of Bengal. The cavalry, the mainstay of the Mughals proved absolutely helpless in traversing the numerous rivers and rivulets of lower Bengal. The Mughals were weak in war-boats, the only effective instrument of war in lower Bengal. The coastal region lay practically defenceless which encouraged the Maghs often to carry on plundering raids.

So far as western Bengal is concerned, the Mughal government succeeded in preventing the Maghs from going up the rivers by building forts at certain strategic places, like the fort at Sibpore and the fort of Hijli. About the Magh fort which stood at the site of Sibpore Botanical Garden, Streynsham Master writes : "In Tannah stands an old fort of mud walls which was built to prevent the incursions of the Arracanese, for it seems that they were so bold that none durst inhabit lower down the river than this place. . . ." The thana or the Magh fort was constructed by Alauddin Husain Shah, the Sultan of Bengal (1493-1519).

But things were different in eastern Bengal where numerous rivers and 'nullahs' made it extremely difficult for the imperial government to put effective check to the incursions of the sea-rovers. Although the Mughals posted troops in the main land of Noakhali district known

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<sup>1</sup> *Noakhali District Gazetteer.*

as Rai Beshis in Chittagong to prevent their incursions by land, they were not at all effective against the Maghs "coming in hundreds in swift moving boats". The Rai Beshis or Hazaris, as they were called, were practically no match for the Maghs or the Feringis in fighting or in cruelties. In the Bakergunj area of the Sundarbans, the Mughal raised a number of fortresses against the Maghs.

In the vicinity of Dacca, on the banks of the rivers Lakhiya and Dulai, there were also Mughal forts to prevent the incursions of the Maghs into the city. But that could not prevent the Maghs from ravaging the villages skirting the river Meghna and threatening the capital Dacca in the year 1620. During the viceroyalty of Islam Khan, two generals—one Hindu and another Muslim—were appointed to guard the coastal region against the Magh incursions and received grants of land, "the land given to the Hindu became in course of time known as Jugdia and other being again divided, formed the parganas of Dadra and Allahabad".<sup>1</sup> The Maghs usually used to invade Bengal during the monsoons and the winter. At that time the Mughal viceroy used to go to Khizrpur situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra with an army and encamped there keeping watch over the movements of the pirates. From 1620 onwards, the Mughal government maintained an armed post at Noakhali to guard the mouth of the canal there, "but the Muhammadan soldiers were no match on the water for the pirates who in their light galleys swept the whole coast and often penetrated 40 miles inland up the mouth and branches of the Meghna".<sup>2</sup> The repeated incursions of the Maghs and the Feringis compelled the Mughal viceroy to confine his energies to the defence of the city of Dacca alone and in order to prevent the coming of the pirate fleet to Dacca, he "stratched some iron chains across the nullah of Dacca and set up some bridges of bamboo on the streams of the city".<sup>3</sup> In the reign of Aurangzeb the Mughal viceroy Mir Jumla took certain measures against the Maghs. He raised a number of fortresses at the confluence of the rivers Lakhiya and the Ichhamati and constructed several military roads in the vicinity of Dacca. But all these efforts proved very little effective against the Maghs. It was left to Shaista Khan who conquered Chittagong and thereby succeeded in breaking the nest of the pirates in 1666. Still, "the formidable nawara built by Shaista Khan and maintained later on had no permanent effect in repelling

<sup>1</sup> *Noakhali District Gazetteer.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Sarkar, *Studies in Mughal India.*

the Maghs, although it was maintained in full strength by Murshid Kuli Khan. ..."<sup>1</sup> As late as Alivardi Khan's time, the Maghs plundered Dacca in the year 1748.

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Ghosh, *Magh Raiders in Bengal*.

## CHAPTER 8

### VICEROYALTY OF MIR JUMLA (1660-1663)

A trusted friend and a general of Aurangzeb, Mir Jumla<sup>1</sup> was entrusted by his patron, the emperor, with the task of overpowering his rival brother Prince Shuja in Bengal. Mir Jumla joined the army of Aurangzeb near Khajwa, the day preceding the battle with Shuja, and by his abilities and courage contributed much to the success of that day. The high opinion entertained of him by Aurangzeb is evinced by his having been selected to carry on the war against Shuja. Although the pursuing force sent against Shuja by Aurangzeb was placed under the command of Prince Muhammad Sultan, Mir Jumla was "the real commander vested with the supreme power of control, dismissal and appointment". He was promoted to the rank of generalissimo of the armies and the high title of Khan Khanan (chief of the nobles). The unlucky aspirant to the imperial throne of Delhi, after his discomfiture in the battle of Khajwa, retraced back to Rajmahal in his flight in March 1659. Mir Jumla arrived at Patna in February, a few days after Prince Shuja's departure from that city. Mir Jumla frustrated the plan of Shuja at Monghyr and pursuing the prince, encamped on the bank of the Ganges at Belghata, only 30 miles from the base of Shuja at Rajmahal. For six days, Shuja resisted all the attacks of the enemy, but finding it almost impossible to remain at Rajmahal any longer, he crossed over the river to Tanda. Mir Jumla immediately occupied Rajmahal and thereby the entire country on the west bank of the Ganges from Rajmahal to Hughli came into the possession of Aurangzeb. The Ganges now separated the rival forces. Henceforward the contest between them became essentially a naval contest. From Khajwa to Rajmahal, it had all along been a land operation in which the imperialists were far superior to the

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Said, better known as Mir Jumla was a Persian merchant-adventurer. He entered the service of Qutub Shah of Golkunda and gradually rose to the position of the Prime Minister of the Golkunda Kingdom. He made a vast fortune by trading in diamonds and precious stones. But his power and wealth incurred the jealousy and alarm of his master. Aurangzeb, Governor of Deccan was attracted by Mir Jumla's capabilities and easily won him over to his side. Mir Jumla deserted the Sultan of Golkunda and joined Aurangzeb before the civil war began.

Shujaites. So far as the naval strategy and the naval forces were concerned, Shuja had certain advantages over the imperialists. Sarkar writes "in the first place, the lord of Bengal, the lord of waterways, had a powerful Nawara. He now either seized the private boats or sunk and burnt them to prevent their capture by the enemy. On the other hand, Mir Jumla's army was nothing but a land force. . . . He had not brought boats with himself and could not hope easily to procure any in Bengal because of Shuja's scorched-earth policy. His initial efforts were paralysed by his pitiable lack of a naval arm".<sup>1</sup> Shuja had other advantages over the imperialists. The entire eastern bank of the Ganges was under his effective control. By raising naval posts at strategic places and keeping at these posts a considerable number of heavy war-boats, Shuja had the advantage of preventing the imperialists from crossing the Ganges. Shuja had another great advantage over the imperialists. In his fleet, he employed Portuguese admirals, sailors and gunners. By mounting his great guns on his boats, Shuja expected to face Mir Jumla with confidence on the western bank of the Ganges. Mir Jumla, on the other hand, had neither sufficient number of war-boats nor the command over the Ganges.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Mir Jumla was also very weak in artillery.

However, after the occupation of Rajmahal by Mir Jumla, a few skirmishes occurred on either banks of the Ganges between the rival forces. But the pressing difficulty of Mir Jumla was to secure boats and sailors without which it was well-nigh impossible for him to chase the fugitive prince. Hence he moved to Dogachi, 13 miles southwards where the course of the Ganges was somewhat narrow and wherefrom Mir Jumla expected to cross the Ganges and to fall upon the Shujaites. In between Dogachi and Bakarpur, there was a high island whose strategic importance caught the imagination of Mir Jumla. The latter made a surprise attack upon the island. The Shujaites were struck with terror and they steered away leaving the entrenchments to be captured by the imperialists. Mir Jumla, realising his deficiency in boats, took measures to defend the western bank between Rajmahal in the north and Suti (28 miles south-east of Rajmahal) in the south by posting contingents at various places, while he himself encamped at Suti. To prevent boats from crossing over to Shuja, Mir Jumla closed all ferries and passages. "So strict was the embargo and so high was the penalty that even stealthy crossings were

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<sup>1</sup> J. N. Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla*, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> *English Factory Records, X*, p. 282.

impossible, nor to speak of open attempts, any culprit detected crossing had his nose and ears cut off.”<sup>1</sup>

Mir Jumla next busied himself in collecting boats and despatched his officers and ‘sardars’ to Hughly, Kasimbazar and other places to fetch boats and boatmen. “He called upon men to supply boats of any kind available, ‘kisti’ or ‘ghurab’, threatening to desolate their country. . . in case of failure. The threat had the desired effect. Within 10 to 15 days about a hundred boats of various sorts were placed at the disposal of the Mir. . .” Mir Jumla made a diplomatic use of his position as the imperial commandant in his relations with the Dutch and the English factors as a counter-poise to the Portuguese support of Shuja. But as he felt it impossible to dislodge Shuja from his entrenched positions, by any frontal attack, Mir Jumla in order to make a diversion in his favour, asked Daud Khan, governor of Bihar, to attack Shuja on the left bank of the Ganges. But before the plan could mature, Prince Muhammad Sultan all of a sudden deserted the imperial camp and went over to Shuja. It was due to the prince’s love for Shuja’s daughter. However, Mir Jumla’s able leadership and personality succeeded in restoring order and discipline in the deserted camp of the prince. Having secured the obedience and loyalty of the soldiers of the deserted prince, Mir Jumla abandoned the posts at Dogachi and Suti and concentrated his troops at Murshidabad and Rajmahal under himself and Zulfiqar Khan respectively.

With the advent of the rains, the initiative passed into the hands of Shuja because of numerous boats at his disposal. Shuja planned an attack upon Rajmahal with a view to cutting off the imperial army’s communications and preventing Mir Jumla from getting supplies from the Europeans at Hughly. Shuja succeeded in isolating Mir Jumla at Murshidabad and hence the latter could do nothing to oppose Shuja’s march upon Rajmahal. Mir Jumla could do nothing to prevent Rajmahal from falling into the hands of Shuja. But during that time, Mir Jumla succeeded in occupying Hughly and Midnapore as the imperialists were superior to the Shujaites on land. After the rains, the contending armies came face to face at Giria. Failing to dislodge Shuja from Giria, Mir Jumla retired towards Murshidabad expecting Daud Khan, the Bihar governor, to make a diversion. Shuja tried his best to cut off Mir Jumla’s communication with Daud Khan.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

But on 26 December 1659, Daud Khan succeeded in forcing a passage across the Kosi by overwhelming Shuja's admiral Khwaja Mishki and advanced towards Tanda. From here, Mir Jumla tried to encircle Shuja and intercepted his southward retreat. At this juncture, while Shuja's position was growing desperate, his son-in-law, Prince Muhammad deserted Shuja and rejoined Mir Jumla. Shuja escaped to Dacca daily deserted by his troops. Mir Jumla hotly pursued the luckless prince and marched upon Dacca in April 1660. All the way to Dacca, the imperialists had to fight out every inch on land and water. Many of the boats of Shuja's fleet were either destroyed in the war or sunk by his order so that they might not be utilised by the imperialists. From Dacca, Shuja assisted by the Arrakan king escaped to Arrakan in May 1660. Bengal thus passed into the possession of the emperor with Mir Jumla's entry into Dacca on 9 May 1660.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Mir Jumla as Governor of Bengal*

After the flight of Prince Shuja to Arrakan, emperor Aurangzeb appointed Mir Jumla as governor of Bengal. The efficiency and skill of Mir Jumla as a general and his whole-hearted devotion to the cause of the emperor encouraged the emperor to raise him to that lofty position. Besides, the chaotic political situation and administrative bankruptcy of the province required a strong hand to restore peace and order in the province. This is evident in the letter of the emperor addressed to Mir Jumla wherein he wrote, "on the whole the laxity in administration, slackness, disobedience and rebellion which have become rampant there for several years, are not unknown to you. . . . In every district the din of rebellion is rife and ringleaders have raised their heads in tumult. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Doubtless, Shuja's misrule gave rise to not only administrative problems but also to political complications. Shuja awfully neglected the administration of the province. The prince was never happy in Bengal. He transferred the capital from Dacca to Rajmahal and entrusted the management of the state affairs to his underlings. The inevitable result was a general slackness in the administration and tyranny of the officials over the subjects. "His constant devotion to pleasure and the easy administration of Bengal made him weak, indolent and negligent, incapable of arduous toil, sustained effort, vigilant caution or profound combination. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, pp. 341-342.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla*.

<sup>3</sup> Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb, I*, Ch. 19.

In addition to leading an easy and luxurious life, Shuja, during his viceroyalty in Bengal was more concerned in accumulating wealth and amassing treasure for himself with a view to fight his rival brothers for the throne of Delhi. Hence there was an all round deterioration in the provincial administration.

On an earlier occasion, Mir Jumla refused the offer of Bengal's governorship on the ground that the older and corrupt section of Bengal's officials might create difficulties for him. But the emperor Aurangzeb was not all prepared to entrust the administration of such an important and problem-ridden Subah to any person other than Mir Jumla who had already established himself in the eyes of the emperor "as a man of lofty integrity, impartial justice and as a cherisher of the subjects". The emperor conferred on him the titles of Khan-i-Khanan and Sipahsalar and a mansab of 7000. He was granted choicest jagirs and salary amounting to one crore of dams, a khilat and ten horses. Besides the emperor honoured Mir Jumla with a belt together with a special bejewelled sword.

Along with the farman appointing Mir Jumla to that lofty position, the emperor sent certain specific instructions for the Mir such as efficiently administering the province, pacifying the subjects, chastising the rebels, reorganising the Mughal 'nawara', regulating the artillery, securing the safety of traffic, collecting customs and reorganising the revenue system on sound basis. Mir Jumla was further instructed to suppress the Maghs and conquer the kingdoms of Kuch Bihar and Assam. The emperor's farman ran thus : "The hand of the strong over the weak, of the oppressor over the oppressed should be removed. And in all affairs you should not transgress the laws of the Shariat and limits of world-adorning justice. Your whole attention should be devoted to the well-being of all creatures of God and the peace of mind of foreign travellers and the inhabitants and the safety of the boundaries. Act in such a way that all people can pursue their work of cultivation in an atmosphere of security from the persons whose profession is oppression."<sup>1</sup> The letter quoted above shows the interest the emperor took in the matter of Bengal administration and the confidence he reposed on Mir Jumla.

Doubtless, Mir Jumla responded to the desires of the emperor with all sincerity and never deviated from the task entrusted to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*



After the expulsion of Prince Shuja from Bengal, the first task before the new viceroy was to transfer the capital from Rajmahal to Dacca with a view to keep the Magh and Feringi pirates in check as well as to reorganise the administrative system for which Dacca was most conveniently situated. Posting of officers was the next task.

Posting of officers

Mukhlis Khan was retained as governor of Rajmahal, Ihtisham Khan was put in the charge of Bengal administration, Bhagwati Das was appointed Diwan of the crown lands and Bhagwan Das and Khwaja Shujai were entrusted with the financial affairs of the imperial government in Bengal and those of Mir Jumla's government respectively. Muhammad Muqim was put in charge of the 'nawara' department and Mir Qazi was appointed paymaster and news-writer.

Mir Jumla next turned his attention to the revenue matters which were in a sorry mess due to the mismanagement of Prince Shuja. It is to be noted that as Shuja's main concern was accumulation of wealth for himself, he took no interest either in putting the revenue matters on a sound basis or augmenting the imperial exchequer.

His heavy and exorbitant demands put the peasants to a miserable plight and made the revenue officers too much oppressive. Mir Jumla showed great moderation in matter of collecting revenue. The condition in the jagirs of the mansabdars was very unsatisfactory. These jagirs were situated in different parganas and there were many co-partners of the mansabdars. As a result there was terrible oppression on the peasants in those jagirs and the method of collection of revenue was extremely wasteful. This resulted in the desolation of many parganas. With a view to bringing order and uniformity in revenue affairs, Mir Jumla confirmed in his own jagirs many aimadars and stipend-holders. As regards the other holders of land, enjoying pensions and 'madad i-maash' grants, their lands were confiscated to the state. The aimadars were ordered to cultivate the lands and pay revenue to the state. But hard-pressed as they were, the aimadars failed to till the lands regularly and as a result there was no expected gain in revenue. Moreover, as the viceroy could not afford to make any personal supervision over the revenue affairs, the pargana officers, jagirdars and zamindars continued oppression on the peasantry. Sometimes they used to seize the land and even wife and daughters of any peasant or new-comer dying without bearing any son.<sup>1</sup> As before,

Reorganisation of revenue system

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<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla*, p. 211.

the state-income was mainly derived from zakat (1/40th of the income), and customs.

Mir Jumla was equally interested in the administration of justice. He expelled the corrupted Qazi and Mir Adil of Dacca and personally administered justice both religious and secular. On the eve of his Kuch Bihar expedition, Mir Jumla left certain instructions about the administration of justice. "He unhesitatingly performed whatever appeared to be just to him."<sup>1</sup>

As governor, Mir Jumla enjoyed absolute authority in Bengal. Besides, he exercised some degree of authority and control over the administration of Bihar and Orissa. At that time the province of Orissa was in a chaotic condition. After consolidating his authority in Bengal, Mir Jumla sent Ihtisham Khan to assume the charge of the administration of Orissa. Acting upon imperial instructions, Mir Jumla resumed to the state many rent-free lands in Orissa. Even after the appointment of Khan-i-Duran as governor of Orissa, Mir Jumla continued to enjoy some hold over that province. Doubtless, by personal exertion, he succeeded in restoring order in Orissa as it is evident from the records of the English factors in Orissa. On the death of Mir Jumla, the Balasore factors observe in their letter of 28 April 1663 that "the governors in these parts, on account of the long absence and distance of the Nawab (Mir Jumla) had been so insolent and illimitable in their exactions that they had very much impaired the trade here. . . this great subject, Khan-i-Khnan (Mir Jumla) being extinct, this country will be immediately under Aurangzeb". Although Orissa was a separate province under a separate governor, Mir Jumla exercised manifold control over that province. He helped Khan-i-Duran in suppressing Bahadur Khan, the rebel zamindar of Hijli. Mir Jumla desired European assistance to conquer Hijli. He even induced Aurangzeb to transfer Hijli to the jurisdiction of Bengal viceroy. He managed to secure some war-boats from the English and the Dutch and ultimately Hijli was occupied and Bahadur Khan with his family members were taken prisoners and brought to Dacca.

Mir Jumla's relations with the Europeans were not always satisfactory. His personal interests often came into clash with those of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

the European companies as the basis of his commercial policy was monopoly. His commercial policy aimed at engrossing all the articles of necessity and selling them at enhanced prices. His agents used to engross the merchandise at the places of their origin or at the ports of unloading and forcing them on the retail dealers at heightened prices. This practice sooner brought the viceroy into clash with the European traders. About 1660, Mir Jumla offered to supply the English factors as much salt-petre as they would require every year. In the opinion of the Madras Council, "he did so for his personal profit". The English factors, on several occasions, complained to the viceroy against the engrossing of their merchandise by the officials at the ports of unloading depriving them of the legitimate profit thereby. A dispute soon developed between Mir Jumla and the English factors on the issue of custom. The faujdar of Hughly demanded an annual payment of Rs. 3,000 in lieu of customs on the ground that the accession of Aurangzeb to the imperial throne had invalidated all the previous grants and sanads obtained by the English factors. This demand of Mir Jumla's government was next followed by another demand as anchorage charges at Balasore. Upon the refusal of the English to accede to these demands, a serious dispute arose. Exasperated at the oppressions and exorbitant demands, the English factors at Hughly seized a ship of Mir Jumla. This incident brought the two parties almost to an open clash. Mir Jumla demanded immediate restoration of the ship and threatened to expel the English factors from the province. However, early in 1660 on the advice of the Madras Council, the English factor Trevisa made an apology and restored the ship. Mir Jumla insisted upon their continuing to pay the pesh-kash or annual offering of 3,000 rupees which had been established by the faujdar of Hughly during the late civil war.<sup>1</sup>

Since the conclusion of the trouble with the English, Mir Jumla treated them with laxity and utilised the services of the English and their ships in transporting his merchandise to Persia without paying any freight charges "in view of his power in Bengal". Mir Jumla had regular trading relations with the English in Bengal and from time to time used to lend huge sums of money to Trevisa, the English agent in the province. These private transactions between Mir Jumla

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 316.

and Trevisa were never approved by the English authorities in Madras. Mir Jumla also utilised the services of the English and their ships for his military purposes. A number of Armenians were impressed into the Mughal army in Mir Jumla's Kuch and Assam campaigns.<sup>1</sup>

Certain administrative problems, however, remained unsolved. The most pressing need was to rebuild the Mughal flotilla which had been miserably depleted by Shuja's negligent administration. At the time of his appointment as governor of Bengal, Mir Jumla was specially instructed to rebuild the 'nawara'. Hence in order to rebuild the 'nawara' anew, Mir Jumla abolished the old system of management. But unfortunately, he could not complete his task as he had to undertake the Kutch and Assam campaigns.

Tasks  
unfinished

#### MIR JUMLA'S CONQUEST OF KUCH BIHAR, 1661

The Kutch Bihar expedition of Mir Jumla marked the most crucial moment in the history of Kuch-Mughal politics. It was a turning point in the history of Kuch Bihar. Because after existing as an independent kingdom for nearly three quarters of a century and serving as a faithful vassal state for about half a century, Kuch Bihar was on the verge of total extinction in the year 1661. On the other hand, Mir Jumla's Kuch expedition marked a definite and determined bid for pushing the Mughal frontier to the extreme north-east on the part of the Mughal government. Contemporary European travellers have coloured Mir Jumla's Kuch expedition as a clever device on the part of Aurangzeb to keep his over-ambitious and successful general at a safe distance in the dreadful country like the north-eastern tract. According to others it was under an impulse of conquering Burma and China and thereby to immortalise his name, that Mir Jumla undertook such a grandiose policy of conquest. But in fact, Mir Jumla was commissioned by the emperor at the time of his appointment to punish the frontier kings of Assam and Arrakan who according to the emperor, inflicted oppressions on the Muslim subjects of the empire. "The real origin is to be traced elsewhere. It is rather to be found in a scheme of deliberate territorial aggression, evolved by the

Real origin and  
nature of the  
enterprise

<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla*, pp. 216-218.

Bengal Viceroy Mir Jumla with the tacit consent and approval of his crafty, suspicious and over-jealous master Aurangzeb."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever might have been the causes of the aggressive campaign of Mir Jumla, it is to be noted that chastisement of the Kutch king was felt imperative in order to secure Mughal dominions in the frontier tract. The political turmoils following the illness of emperor Shah Jahan and the subsequent internecine warfare among the imperial princes placed the Mughal territory of Kamrup between two fires. There began continuous aggressions on Kamrup by the rulers of Kuch Bihar from the west and those of Assam from the east. The reigning Kuch king Prannarayan was determined to shake off Mughal vassalage. He indulged in a series of aggressive activities against the Mughal authority, ceased to pay tribute and made plundering raids into the frontier districts in Ghoraghat on the right bank of the Karatoya river. Hence war between the Mughals and the Kutch king was inevitable. Mir Jumla was actuated not only by imperialistic designs, but also by a desire for "a holy war with the infidels of Assam" and "an ardent passion for releasing Mussalmans (prisoners of war), rooted out idolators, lifting up the banner of Islam and destruction of the customs of unbelief and error."

The news of Aurangzeb's final triumph over his rival brothers and Mir Jumla's grand military preparations for the impending Kuch campaign, alarmed Prannarayan. He thought it wise to submit to the Mughal emperor again. He sent an envoy to Mir Jumla with a letter of apology for his disloyalty. But the Mir instead of responding to the appeal of the Kuch king, imprisoned the Kuch envoy and ordered Raja Sujan Singh and Mirza Beg to proceed against Kuch Bihar.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 November 1661, Mir Jumla and Dilir Khan started from Dacca with ten to twelve thousand cavalry, numerous infantry and a powerful fleet of war-boats numbering at least 323. There were Dutch, Portuguese and English sailors and gunners in the imperial army. "The Dutch were conscripted, but the English and the Portuguese were volunteers."<sup>3</sup> On the news of the approach of the imperial army near the border of the Kuch kingdom, the Kuch sentinels

Kuch King's  
futile attempt to  
stay off Mughal  
attack

Mir Jumla  
attacks the Kuch  
realm

<sup>1</sup> Bhattacharya, *Mughal North East Frontier Policy*, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Sarkar, *Op.cit.*, p. 227.

left their post in great terror. At a place three stages from the capital of Kuch Bihar, the news of the flight of the Kuch king reached the Mughal viceroy. After a six days' march, the imperial army marched upon the capital and occupied it without any opposition (19 December 1661). The viceroy annexed Kuch Bihar to the Mughal empire for the first time. He took certain measures to overcome popular opposition. He forbade customary plunder and ravage of the conquered territory, checked the indiscretions of the Mughal soldiers and assured the protection and security of the subject people.

Before his departure from Kuch Bihar, Mir Jumla made certain arrangements for the administration of the conquered kingdom.

Administrative measures A Mughal faujdar was posted at Kuch Bihar with an army till the arrival of a permanent incumbent. A Qazi and two Muslim 'amins' for carrying on territorial adjustments of the conquered territory were appointed. The name of the capital city was changed to Alamgirnagar. Another officer was posted at Kanthalbari to keep watch over the fugitive Kuch king.

Although Mir Jumla's Kuch campaign was a great military success, the political results were short-lived. The viceroy had no sufficient time at his disposal to consolidate the Mughal authority in the conquered realm and it slipped away from his hands within five months of its occupation.<sup>1</sup>

Conclusion

#### MIR JUMLA'S ASSAM CAMPAIGN, 1662-63

Mir Jumla's Assam campaign has already been told in Chapter 5. After the conquest of Assam, Mir Jumla adopted the same conciliatory policy in regard to the conquered as he did in regard to the people of Kuch Bihar. And this speaks of his sound statesmanship. The political offenders were no doubt severely punished. The rebel and recalcitrant Ahoms were rounded up and presented before the viceroy for necessary punishment. According to the unnamed Dutch Sailor, Mir Jumla offered them fifty rupees for "every head they brought him" and hundred rupees for each recalcitrant Ahom captured alive. A large number of the Ahoms captured by the Mughal soldiers were first cruelly treated and then beheaded. The purpose of such cruelty

His treatment of the people of Assam

<sup>1</sup> Bhattacharya, *Op.cit.*, p. 308.

was to terrorise the Ahoms to submission. While those helping the imperialists in any way against their king were kindly treated. Those who were not guilty of political offence, were liberally rewarded and measures were taken for their welfare. The object of such moderation was to win over the Ahom peasantry so that they might not resort to guerilla activities against the imperialists. He strictly forbade plunder of property and rape of women on the part of the Mughal soldiers. "This order continued in force till the return of the Mughal army from Assam and not a single amir, trooper or soldier or camp-follower could dare lustful eyes on any one's property or women in Assam."<sup>1</sup> Mir Jumla released a large number of Muslim prisoners of Kamrup from confinement and made necessary arrangements for their rehabilitation. Those who suffered at the hands of the Ahoms were granted remission of the current year's revenue.

Mir Jumla's success in reconciling the vanquished Ahoms was partial. In spite of his generosity and kindness, the Ahoms "did not at all become submissive to the people of Islam". Destruction and plunder of temples and places of worship by the Mughals wounded the feeling of the Ahoms in general. The Ahoms remained quiet for some time. But as soon as the opportunity came, they joined their fugitive king and made the position of the imperialists untenable in their country. Ultimately, "The Assam expedition of Mir Jumla unfolded itself like a Greek tragedy. Here all the wisdom and energy of a superman were foiled by an invisible fate. . . . Hence his (Mir Jumla's) admiring historian Shihab-ud-din Muhammad Talish has rightly named his narrative of Mir Jumla's last wars as 'Fathiyya-i-iberiyya' or conquests that serve as a warning about the emptiness of human glory."<sup>2</sup> The Mughal posts had to be withdrawn from Assam, the conquered portions of the country had to be restored to the Ahom king and Mir Jumla with a broken and demoralised army had to bid a hasty retreat dying on 31 March 1663 near Khizrpur, a few miles short of Dacca.

**An estimate.** Observing on the character and personality of Mir Jumla, Stewart writes: "Mir Jumla was one of those characters who have risen more in consequence of their own abilities than by any peculiar instance of good fortune. He possessed an excellent understanding, great coolness of mind and undaunted courage. He was calculated for the intrigues of the cabinet as well as for the stratagems

<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, *Op.cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 345.

of the field. In private life he was amiable and just. He disdained to use ungenerous means against his adversaries and even expressed his joy on the escape of Sultan Shuja from his arms. . . His death was even regretted by the Europeans who had formerly complained of his exactions."<sup>1</sup> Doubtless, Mir Jumla proved himself a successful warrior and a strategist as it is evident in his warfare against Prince Shuja. It was the loyalty and sound generalship of Mir Jumla that was responsible for speedy expulsion of Prince Shuja from Bengal as well as restoring imperial authority in the province. In fact, it was in recognition of Mir Jumla's meritorious services in the face of numerous odds created by Prince Shuja that Aurangzeb appointed him permanent governor of Bengal and bestowed on him high ranks and rewards. Mir Jumla was present in the province for barely a year and a half, being absent on campaigns in Kutch Bihar and Assam from November 1661. Hence within such a short period, whatever was possible for reorganising the government and solving many political and administrative problems, he did, although many of such pressing problems could not be solved by him. He proved his ability as a general and strategist again in his wars with Kuch Bihar and Assam. For the first time Kuch Bihar was thoroughly annexed to the Mughal empire and Assam was conquered. The Assam campaign was the last greatest one of his life. This was the first and last Mughal campaign which pushed the Mughal frontier far into Assam. As Sarkar writes : "Mir Jumla succeeded where Muhammad bin Tughluq of Delhi and Alauddin Husain Shah of Bengal had signally failed."<sup>2</sup> He showed great prudence and caution during the retreat from Assam. His treatment of the conquered people was laudable which speaks of his generous temperament.

Though Mir Jumla was sometimes unkind to the European traders, his death was mourned even by them. "His death was regretted by the Europeans who had formerly complained of his exactions."<sup>3</sup> Referring to the glaring qualities of Mir Jumla, Bowrey writes : "Mir Jumla died to the great grief of all wise and eminent persons in these kingdoms, not a little dolefull to the poor and the great losses these kindgoms sustained is un-measurable. They lost the best of nabobs, the kingdom of Acham and by consequence, many large privileges."

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Sarkar, *Op.cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 324.



## CHAPTER 9

### VICEROYALTY OF SHAISTA KHAN

(1664-78, 1679-88)

#### *Condition of Bengal on the Eve of Shaista Khan's Arrival*

The condition of Bengal on the eve of Shaista Khan's arrival as the viceroy of the province was deplorable. Bengal could not recover fully from the serious lapses and negligence of Prince Shuja's failure as a ruler Shuja's government. The Bengal administration both civil and military was in a decaying state when Mir Jumla assumed the reins of government of the province. It has already been stated that Mir Jumla, despite his best intentions, could not satisfactorily solve some of the pressing problems, both administrative and political, of the province. He made certain adjustments in the government offices here and there, appointed some new officers but he completely failed to reorganise the revenue affairs on any satisfactory basis which assumed a chaotic state. The financial chaos had already started during the tenure of Prince Shuja due to the mismanagement of the crown lands, and the officers' jagirs on the one hand and the prince's all endeavours to amass wealth by any means for himself without any thought of the provincial exchequer and the welfare of the peasants on the other. Mir Jumla's revenue measure could not improve the affairs in any way. Rather the aimadars' who were entrusted with the task of tilling the lands did not do so and hence there was no gain in revenue. The method of collection of revenue as introduced by Mir Jumla was wasteful and the parganas became desolate. Mir Jumla was present in the province for barely a year and a half. Hence neither he could stabilise the revenue matters nor check the atrocities of the revenue collectors on the peasants.

Prince Shuja's mismanagement of the Mughal flotilla and his 'scorched-earth' policy completely destroyed the flotilla which was the only effective instrument of war against the Magh-Feringi pirates. Mir Jumla failed to revive the flotilla.

During Mir Jumla's Assam expedition, a serious famine visited Bengal which lasted for about two years. Hundreds and thousands

of souls perished due to famine. The prices of grain soared high owing to the high rate of Zakat, the virtual suspension of movements of grain traders on account of internal insecurity, "the grasping habits of the 'chowkidars' and the oppression of the 'rahdars' (toll-collectors)".

Famine in Bengal

The miseries and distress of the people were so acute that in the words of Talish, "Life appeared to be cheaper than bread and bread was not to be found."

Mir Jumla's death after the disaster of Assam campaign was followed by a general wave of laxity and utter confusion in the government of Bengal. The internal administration had

Total breakdown in the administration

already collapsed following Shuja's departure from the province. Shuja by transferring the capital from Dacca to Rajmahal had denuded Bengal of experienced

officials. The government of Bengal for all practical purposes was starved of men and neglected. Mir Jumla, before restoring order in the government, proceeded to conquer Kuch Bihar and Assam. He was absent from the province for a period of 17 months and at last he returned a dead man. In the intervening period between the death of Mir Jumla and the arrival of Shaista Khan, Bengal was governed by subordinates without a supreme ruler and hence disorder and confusion in the administration reigned supreme.

During Mir Jumla's absence in Kuch Bihar and Assam, Ihtisham Khan was in charge of the defence of Bengal with the rank of the deputy subahdar. Rai Bhagwati Das was in charge

State of affairs in the transition

of revenue affairs. It took the Bengal officers seven weeks to send the report of Mir Jumla's death to the emperor who was in Lahore enroute to

Kashmir. Ordered by the emperor, Ihtisham Khan proceeded to the imperial court together with the family members of Mir Jumla, the latter's property and elephants. Dilir Khan was nominated to act as the governor of Bengal pending the arrival of Daud Khan. Accordingly, Dilir Khan took charge of the government on 17 May 1663 and continued in that position till the arrival of Daud Khan on 27 September. Finally Shaista Khan took charge of the government and relieved Daud Khan on 8 March 1664.

Hence during this transition the administration of Bengal deteriorated to a great extent and it resembled something like the "reign of mice in a neglected barn". A disgraceful instance of the political instability and chaos was evident at the festival of Id-ul-Fitr within

a month of Mir Jumla's death. "On that day the gathering of the faithful in prayer and the ceremonious ending of the month of fast, were held and the Emperor's titles proclaimed from the pulpit not in full congregation at the 'Id-gah' but at three different places in the same village of Khizrpur by the three highest officers, each in proud aloofness among his partisans, by Ihtisham Khan near his office, Dilir Khan in his camp and Munawarkhan (the grandson of Isa Khan of Bhati and the chief of the Bengal zaminders' flotilla) near his residence."<sup>1</sup> This clearly shows disunity in the rank of the imperial officers who were more interested in exhibiting importance and prowess of each. It is unmistakably true that without a supreme master on the spot, the highest officials behaved like all-powerful autocrats, vying with each other for power and prominence which produced serious repercussions on the provincial administration. The intervening period between the death of Mir Jumla and the assumption of power by Shaista Khan was a period of power without responsibility.

The selfish desires of the officials were kept in check by the strong personality of Mir Jumla. But as soon as that over-powering master died, "everyone began to beat the drum of arrogance". The selfish desires of the officials and ambitious men got a free play. The acting governor Ihtisham Khan turned into a tyrant, Dilir Khan, as rival of Ihtisham Khan in position and who was second-in-command of the army during Mir Jumla's time, was greatly jealous of Ihtisham Khan. The rivalry between these two highest officers seriously impaired the discipline and efficiency of the subordinates. These two officers created their individual sphere of interest with a group of self-seeking men. In the general atmosphere of prodigality, and nepotism, each turned to his patron for personal aggrandisement and preferment or other. Shiahuddin Talish has applied the term "days of nature" to this intervening period and has observed that "strange were the revolution and disorder that had taken place after the death of Mir Jumla". Talish has left a graphic picture of the condition of Bengal following the death of Mir Jumla. Firstly, all the experienced and efficient officers of Bengal had either perished in the internecine war and the Assam campaign or had gone to the imperial court. The talented Persian Shias raised to high offices by Prince Shuja were discharged after Aurangzeb's accession to the throne.

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<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 372.

Most of Mir Jumla's adherents who were Shias like himself suffered the same fate. Secondly, as Talish writes, "the temporary rulers in the absence of a substantive viceroy, made the most of their brief day of borrowed power by freely indulging in those wicked desires which they had so long kept in check in fear of Mir Jumla. Everyone asked for everything that he fancied and these officials granted it with the utmost liberality like issuing an order on a river to supply water to a petitioner.<sup>1</sup> This they considered a cheap way of gaining fame. Those men, including the author, who did not supplicate these upstart officials got nothing. They restored zamindars to their estates, of which they had been deprived (for treason or revenue default). Some zamindars who had clung to their old homes by promising to pay double their normal revenue now got their old assessment restored. My friends wittily called this interregnum 'the festival of breaking the Ramzan fast'. In truth, a strange confusion overtook public affairs."<sup>2</sup>

The subordinate officials, backed by their respective patrons tried to enrich themselves as quickly as possible by extorting money from the poor people on various pretexts, viz. by demanding revenue from the persons enjoying rent-free land as well as from those whose names were borne on the rent-roll and by indulging in a monopoly trade in the necessaries of life. This monopoly trade of the officials seriously injured the retail dealers in articles of daily use. The European traders were also not spared. At every ferry or toll-post, the European traders were harassed and money extorted from them. Even the foreign articles imported by the European traders were seized by the officials and forcibly taken away on paying a nominal price. As a result the European traders were deprived of their legitimate profit. Internal trade dwindled as the local traders gave up their trade and import of bullion also suffered greatly as the European traders almost stopped their trade and commerce for some time. Bengal's economy came to a stand still.<sup>3</sup>

The spirit of negligence and corruption was not only evident in the administrative and economic spheres. It was equally evident in military affairs. Immediately with the retreat of Mir Jumla from the north-eastern frontier tract, the Ahoms recovered their lost territories and the king of Kuch Bihar re-occupied his kingdom. The

<sup>1</sup> *Fathiya* (Contd.), vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 373.

expedition for the reconquest of Kuch Bihar was postponed. The temporary rulers of Bengal made no efforts in this direction which, doubtless, encouraged the frontier rulers to make encroachment upon Mughal territories. The negligence of the Bengal officials towards the military affairs and the general laxity in the administration, emboldened the king of Arrakan to occupy all the eastern coast up to the mouth of the Ganges. The Arrakan king, finding that no notice was taken of his conduct by Prince Shuja, concluded that the Mughals were afraid of his power. Hence he started aggressive activities afresh and with the help of the Portuguese adventurers began to extend his ravages to all the islands not in his possession, throwing thereby a great challenge to the Mughal government of Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

### *Shaista Khan's Arrival and his Rule*

Such was the condition of Bengal on the eve of Shaista Khan's arrival in the province as the substantive governor. Shaista Khan ruled Bengal for nearly a quarter of a century. He was a son of Asaf Khan and maternal uncle of Aurangzeb. He entered Rajmahal on 13 December 1664. He was already 63 when he first came to Bengal and his long residence in Bengal completely sapped his health and vigour. In early years, Shaista Khan earned great reputation for his remarkable military vigour and capacity. He fought and won many difficult battles in the Deccan in the time of Shah Jahan. But in Bengal he was an exhausted old man who left the administration and military campaigns to his subordinates and his four gifted sons, while he himself enjoyed the pleasure of his harem.

Shaista Khan first devoted himself to the task of reviving the moribund administration of the province and re-building the Mughal flotilla. He concerned himself mostly in setting the revenue affairs to order and sending remittance to the imperial court. Although he himself lived at the provincial capital in magnificence and pleasure, he was not unmindful of the administrative and political problems. In the work of internal administration, he was ably served and assisted by his four sons—Buzrug Umed Khan, who conquered Chittagong and subsequently appointed Subahdar of Bihar, Zafar Khan who was appointed thanadar of Chittagong ; Abu Nasar who was appointed

Shaista Khan's entry to Rajmahal and Dacca

Internal administration

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 326.

deputy Subahdar of Orissa and Iradat Khan who conquered Kuch Bihar and appointed faujdar of Kuch Bihar and Rangamati. Three other sons of Shaista Khan are mentioned in *Measir-i-Alamgiri*, viz. Itiqad Khan, Khuda Banda Khan and Abdul Muala.

Shaista Khan, upon his arrival at Dacca, collected information about the appointments and promotions of the officers made after Mir Jumla's death by the acting subahdars. Most of them were dismissed and only a few who were really necessary for administration were retained in service. Talish writes : "I have noted this difference between Shaista Khan and other servants of the crown in the matter of saving government money that they desired solely to gain credit with the emperor while his aim is pure devotion and loyal service."<sup>1</sup>

In order to augment the provincial revenue, Shaista Khan introduced certain reforms. The 'aimadars' and stipend-holders of the suba of Bengal made certain complaints to the viceroy. The facts of their case were—that Mir Jumla confirmed in his own jagirs many of these men who were known for their devotion to Revenue administration virtue and some who had got farmans of Shah Jahan before. All other men who had been enjoying 'madad-i-maash' grants and pensions in the crownlands and fiefs of jagirdars were attacked by Qazi Rizavi, the 'Sadr' ; their sanads were rejected and their stipends and subsistence cancelled. It was ordered that the 'aimadars' should cultivate the lands they held in 'madad-i-maash' and pay revenue to the department of crownlands or to the jagirdars. But the hard-pressed 'aimadars' failed to till their lands and many of them who had the capacity sold their property, pledged their children as serfs and thus paid the revenue for the current year, preserving their lives as their only stock for the next year."<sup>2</sup> Some who had no property or any other kind of subsistence were tortured to death. Even by the resumption of the cultivated lands, sufficient gain in the form of produce could not be achieved. Because the 'aimadars' abstained from tilling the lands that had been escheated to the state and even chastisement of the 'amals' could not make them engage in cultivation. Hence the land remained desolate and the 'aimadars' impoverished and aggrieved. Due to long distance and difficult communications, these poor and perplexed people could not go to the imperial court to place their grievances and to "get the wicked

<sup>1</sup> Talish, *Fathiya* (Contd.), vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

and oppressive officials punished and hence their sighs and lamentations reached the sky". As an instance of the pitiable condition of the 'aimadars', Talish writes that one day Shaista Khan came to know that an old aimadar was on the verge of committing suicide by suspending his head upside down, one yard above the ground, from a tree. The viceroy ordered Talish to go and ask the reason. "I went to the old man", writes Talish "and inquired. He replied 'My son who held 30 bighas of land in 'madad-i-maash' had died. The 'amals' now demand from me one year's revenue of the land. As I have no wealth, I shall give up my life and thus free myself from the oppression'."<sup>1</sup> Talish reported the matter to the viceroy who gave the old 'aimadar' a large sum and then confirmed his son's rent-free land on him. The viceroy was, doubtless, kind to the oppressed and hard-pressed 'aimadars' and other stipend-holders. Hence, he ordered that Mir Sayid Sadiq, the 'Sadr' should fully recognise the 'madad-i-maash' which these men had been enjoying in the crownlands for long on the strength of the parwanas of the former rulers.

He instructed that henceforth the rent-free lands in the fiefs of the jagirdars, if it amountd to 1/40th of the total revenue of the jagirdars should be considered as the 'zakat' on his property and should be spared from taxation. But if the rent-free land exceeded that amount (i.e. 1/40th), the jagirdar should be at liberty to respect or resume the excess. "Whosoever held whatever rent-free land in the parganahs of the jagir of the Nawab (Viceroy) on the strength of the sanad of whomsoever, was to be confirmed in it without any diminution and was on no account to be troubled by demand of revenue. As for those, who had no means of subsistence and now, for the first time, begged daily allowances and lands in the jagir of the Nawab, the diwani officers were ordered to further their desires without any delay."<sup>2</sup>

Mir Sayid the 'Sadr' carried out the orders of the viceroy in respect of the crownlands and the jagirs of the jagirdars. In the jagir of the viceroy, a number of virtuous men were confirmed. Every day two to three hundred 'aimadars' presented their sanads to the 'Sadr' and the following day in the viceroy's presence the Sadr passed them through the record-office and sealed them and then gave them back to the 'aimadars'. "In short, he exhibited such great labour that everyone of this class of men (aimadars) got what he desired."

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Shaista Khan issued an order to the revenue officials that in the parganas of his own jagir, everything collected by the revenue officers above the standard revenue should be refunded to the ryots. He abolished the collection of zakat (i.e. 1/40th of the income) from the merchants, and travellers and of customs ('hasil') from artificers, tradesmen and new-comers Hindus and Muslims alike. Dwelling on the history of the taxation mentioned above, Talish writes: "From the first occupation of India and its part by the Muslims to the end of Shah Jahan's reign, it was a rule and practice to exact 'hasil' from every trader—from the rose-vendor down to the clay-vendors, from the weaver of fine linen to that of coarse cloth—to collect house tax from new-comers and husksters, to take zakat from travellers, merchants and stable-keepers ('mukari')."<sup>1</sup> The collection of these taxes entailed much oppression and as Sadi has said: "At first the basis of oppression was small, but every successive generation increased it." In all provinces of the Mughal empire, especially in Bengal, the collections of these taxes became so much oppressive that tradesmen and merchants abandoned their professions and "house-holders took to exile". The greedy collectors never gave them any relief. Even on the roads and ferries matters came to such a pass that no rider was allowed to go unless he paid a 'dinar' and no pedestrain unless he paid a 'diram' to the collectors. "On the river highways", writes Talish, "if the wind brought it to the ears of the toll-collectors ('rahdars') that the stream was carrying away a broken boat without paying the 'hasil', they would chain the river. If the toll-officers heard that the wave had taken away a broken plank without paying zakat, they would beat it on the back of its head in the form of the wind. They considered it an act of un-parallelled lincency if no higher zakat was taken from rotten clothes actually worn on the body than from mended rags and a deed of extreme graciousness if cooked food was charged with a lower duty than un-cooked grains."<sup>2</sup> None of the sovereigns of Delhi made any efforts to put down such exactions and illegal practices. It was Aurangzeb, who issued specific orders prohibiting such collections in future. The emperor's order for abolishing zakat and hasil in Bengal were put into effect in the parganas of the crownlands. The viceroy had a free choice in his jagir with regard to all exactions excepting the 'rahadari' and 'abwabs' (cesses). Shaista Khan abolished 'hasil'

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



amounting to 15 lakhs of rupees annually which used to be collected in his own jagir.<sup>1</sup>

So long it had been a practice that when any person died in any pargana without leaving any son, all his property, including even his wife and daughter was forcibly taken possession of by the department of crownlands or the jagirdar or the landlord who had such power. Such practice was called 'ankura' (hooking). This despicable practice reached such a grave dimension that Shaista Khan was compelled to abolish it and thereby gave much relief to ryots and others.

In the kotwali-chabutras, it was a custom long prevailing that whenever a person proved a loan or claim against another or a person's stolen property as recovered, the clerks of the chabutra, in paying to the claimant his due, used to seize for the state one-fourth of it under the name of 'fee for exertion'. Shaista Khan abolished this practice too.

It was during the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan that Pipli and Balasore were transferred to the subah of Bengal. The news of this transfer was reported in a letter from the Dutch Governor-General and Council to the Directors in Holland in January (15/21) 1667 thus: "Khwaja Muhammad Yusuf, Governor of Pipli and Balasore, having been much harassed by the exactions of Chan Doura (Khan Duran), Nawab of Orissa fled to Dacca with 16 or 18 armed vessels (which had been equipped for Arakanese war) and there placed himself under the protection of Cha Estachan (Shaista Khan). By the favour of the emperor, the government of latter (i.e. Bengal) was extended into Orissa; the aforesaid Balasore and Pipli being withdrawn from Chan Doura. . . Cha Estachan (Shaista Khan) now being the master of these sea-ports (i.e. Pipli and Balasore), it will be more than ever necessary to gain his favour."<sup>2</sup>

Shaista Khan resumed paying five lakhs of rupees as the tribute of Bengal to the emperor. Jahangir for the first time made it obligatory on the part of the viceroy of Bengal to remit five lakhs of rupees to the emperor and an equal amount of the empress. This payment fell into default practically throughout the reign of Shah Jahan. Shaista Khan resumed the payment. He promised to pay the amount annually as the tribute of Bengal as long as the emperor was out on his

Tribute and presents to emperor

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *The English Factory Records (1665-67)*, Ed. Foster.

Deccan campaign. It is on record that this annual tribute continued till 1685. In 1682, Shaista Khan remitted one lakhs of rupees to the emperor as the *jaziya* collected in Bengal. Besides remitting the annual tribute, Shaista Khan gave a loan of seven lakhs of rupees to the emperor and made a personal present to the emperor a sum of 30 lakhs of rupees besides 4 lakhs worth of jewels.<sup>1</sup>

It is true as Talish has asserted that Shaista Khan on his coming to Bengal in 1664, abolished the trade monopolies of his predecessors and the *abwabs* forbidden by the imperial court. But a few years after, he gave a free hand to his underlings to feed his prodigal luxury by raising money in the old tortuous way both from the local people and the European merchants. European testimony on Shaista Khan's extortions and covetousness is unassailable. He maintained a numerous harem, led a life of luxury and splendour, made costly presents to the emperor from time to time and when retired from Bengal, carried with him a vast treasure. "Such extravagance could be maintained only by squeezing the people. His subordinates were left free to raise money for him by every means that they could think of ; merchandise was stopped at every outpost and ferry and custom duty charged over and over again in disregard to official permits; cesses (*abwabs*) abolished by imperial decree, still continued to be realised in practice. In addition, the Nawab practised a monopoly of the salt trade, betel-nut and some other prime necessities of life. Thus by grinding the masses, he amassed a vast treasure, besides building costly edifices at Dacca, the memory of which still lingers. Indeed, Bengal's only attraction for him was the ease of administering such a soft population and the gold to be had here for the picking."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Shaista Khan resorted to various means to amass wealth for himself besides indulging in monopoly trade in the essentials of life. Streysham Master has described Shaista Khan as "a man who is everyday more covetous than other, so that to relate the many ways that are continually invented by his diwan . . . to bring money into his coffers would be endless". According to Master, Shaista Khan in his less than 13 years' governorship (1664-77) of Bengal had "got so great a treasure as the like is seldom heard of now-a-days in the world, being computed by knowing persons at 38 krores of rupees and his income is daily two

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

lakhs rupees, of which his expenses is about one half".<sup>1</sup> About 1672, there was a rumour that the emperor was intending to send his third son Muhammad Azam to Bengal to succeed Shaista Khan which "made the Nawab (Shaista Khan) more vigorously rack the country, getting in all the money he possibly could and collecting taxes in advance".<sup>2</sup> An Assamese traditional history states that "he (Shaista Khan) accumulated 17 krores of rupees".<sup>3</sup> Shaista Khan's extortions and his avariciousness were reported to the emperor by the spies. Shaista Khan himself went to the imperial court and explained the true state of things. "As the alleged dissipation of the imperial revenue was unfounded, he was re-invested with the 'khalat' of appointment and sent back to Bengal."<sup>4</sup>

Although Shaista Khan never left the capital city of Dacca on any state-business, his hold and control over the entire administration and the people was absolute. He boosted up the dying spirit of the officials by holding before them the prospects of rewards and favours. He introduced vigour into the administration by making new recruits and re-posting the old officials. He made the 'diwan' almost a subordinate to himself and brought the faujdars under his strict control. By appointing his four sons to higher posts next to himself, he succeeded in enjoying loyalty of his subordinates and in maintaining peace and order throughout the province. Refractory elements and particularly, the partisans of Prince Shuja were thoroughly subdued and made harmless and this is evident in the European accounts.

Shaista Khan effectively solved the problem of rebuilding of the flotilla where Mir Jumla miserably failed. Without going into details, it would suffice to say here that although at first, the prospect appeared hopeless, Shaista Khan's energy and persistence overcame every obstacle. Within a year, a new navy was created, manned and equipped. He made the navy strong and efficient by impressing the Europeans into the naval service. Against the Maghs, he took certain administrative steps. He took steps to guard and fortify his southern frontier outpost. He appointed an Afghan named Sayid with 500 rocketeers and musketeers in charge of the Noakhali outpost. Muhammad Sharif, the faujdar of Hughly was entrusted with the task of defending

Re-building of the navy and measures against the Maghs

<sup>1</sup> S. Master, *Diary*, I, p. 493.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Factory Records, 1670-77*, p. xxix.

<sup>3</sup> Bhuyan, *Annals*, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Salim, *Riyaz*, p. 227.

the outpost of SankramKadah with 500 rocketeers, 1000 infantry and 20 guns. He posted Muhammad Beg and Abul Hassan with the imperial war-boats at Sripur to patrol the river. An embanked road from Sripur to Alamgirnagar (Kuch Bihar) covering a distance of 42 miles was constructed for military purposes so that it might not be flooded during the monsoons. In order to prevent the Maghs from making direct infiltration, Shaista Khan thought it necessary to reconquer Sondwip from the hands of Dilwar Khan, a run-away Mughal Captain. Shaista Khan ordered Abul Hassan to bring round Dilawar or to punish him as he secretly aided the Maghs. Accordingly, Abul Hassan attacked Sondwip and Dilawar took to flight. Without occupying the island effectively, Abul Hassan came back to Noakhali. Shaista Khan, on hearing of this, sent another fleet consisting of 1500 gunners and 400 cavalry commanded by Ibn Husain, the Superintendent of the flotilla, to reinforce Abul Husain, to co-operate with the latter and to occupy Sondwip. Ibn Husain moved upto Noakhali and halted there in order to blockade the passage of the Magh fleet. Abul Husain with others then made an assault upon Sondwip, wounded and captured Dilawar's son Sharif and after a strenuous fighting captured Dilawar with his followers. Being apprised of the victory, Shaista Khan appointed Abdul Karim to the charge of Sondwip with 200 cavalry and 1000 infantry. The inhabitants of Sondwip were favourably treated and assured of protection by the Mughal government. Revenue officers were sent to Sondwip for assessing and fixing 'nawara' jagirs for the maintenance of a division of the 'nawara' at Sondwip. Reconquest and imposition of imperial rule over the island was, doubtless, a great achievement of Shaista Khan.<sup>1</sup>

His precautionary measures secured the province against Magh incursions and his ultimate conquest of Chittagong in 1666 put an end to Magh menace. The recovery of Sondwip and the conquest of Chittagong bear testimony to his administrative and strategic skill.

During the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan a severe famine visited Patna in 1671 to which hundreds and thousands fell victim. According to the reports of the English factors, in the latter end of May 1671, "there died of famine in Patna about 100 persons daily and had so for 3 or 4 months, Corn was then sold, wheat, 2½ rupees per maund; barley, 2 rupees; rice (fine), 4 rupees; rice (coarse), 2½ rupees; goat flesh 2 rupees; oil

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<sup>1</sup> Riyaz, (Foot Note), pp. 229-30.

7 rupees per maund. . . It is reported that since the beginning of October there have died of famine in Pattana and the suburbs about 20,000 persons and there cannot in that time have gone fewer from the city than 1,50,000 persons. . . The most of the poor that go hence to Dacca for victuals, though there is thought to be great quantities of rice in these ports, yet through the Nabab's roguery here is a famine and also something from the dryness of the last year. . . that in 12 months ending 24 November (1671) there died in Pattana and the suburbs of the famine, 15,644 Mussalmans to whom the Nabab gave cloth to cover them when buried having no friends to bury them, dying in the streets and it is thought 2,500 died in the skirts of the town in their houses. . . And it is supposed 4 times as many Hindus died as Mussalmans which were 72,576. . . And the towns near Pattana, some are quite depopulated having not any person in them. . ."<sup>1</sup> The English factor at Kasimbazar, Vincent, dwelling on the famine wrote in his letter thus : ". . . the late famine and the great exactions of the Nawab and his griping officers had reduced these people to such extremities as they can hardly feed themselves and their families."<sup>2</sup> Shaista Khan arranged for relief by opening some of his personal granaries as well as distributing a few lakhs of rupees as dole to the poor. But the lack of sincerity and covetousness of the officers in charge of relief frustrated the scheme of the viceroy.

#### *Shaista Khan's Relations with Kuch Bihar and other Frontier States*

In January, 1662, Mir Jumla, before proceeding on his Ahom campaign, made certain arrangements for the occupied state of Kuch Bihar. He left Isfandiyar Beg as the acting faujdar of Kuch Bihar pending the arrival of Askar Khan as the substantive faujdar. But the Mughal officers, during Mir Jumla's absence in Assam, by trying to impose the revenue collection system of upper India on the conquered people of Kuch Bihar, drove them into open rebellion. Besides, the greedy Mughal officers recklessly plundered the richer section of Kuch Bihar. The result was disastrous. The people of the country rose up in arms and began to attack the Mughal garrisons. The Mughal garrison at the capital city was too weak to resist an infuriated populace and there was no hope of reinforcement from Mir Jumla.

The Mughals  
lost Kuch Bihar

<sup>1</sup> Vide, S. Ahmed Khan, *John Marshall in India*, pp. 149-51.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, *The English Traders in Bengal*, (1670-77), p. 353.

The monsoons dislocated the communications and isolated the fortified outposts. Taking advantage of the situation, the Kuch king Pranarayan came down from his mountain asylum and on his arrival at the capital, was welcomed by his people, sick of foreign domination. The Mughal faujdar with his men left Kuch Bihar. Thus the Mughal domination over Kuch Bihar came to an inglorious end and Kuch Bihar regained her independence. All the subsequent efforts of Mir Jumla to recover Kuch Bihar proved abortive. After Mir Jumla's death, nothing could be done to reconquer Kuch Bihar due to the laxity of the temporary governors of Bengal.

Upon his arrival in Bengal, Shaista Khan was determined to carry to a successful conclusion the unfinished work of Mir Jumla. Precisely he was ordered by Aurangzeb to punish the Kuch king for his disloyalty as well as to impose imperial rule on the country. Upon his arrival at Rajmahal in March 1664, Shaista Khan announced his design to conquer Kuch Bihar on his way to the capital. The news of this design of the new viceroy must have alarmed the Kuch king. So long the Kuch king could defy the Mughal power due to the tactlessness of the local imperial officials, the Kuch king's personal popularity and above all the favourable turn of circumstances. But now the Kuch king thought it prudent to save his kingdom by submitting himself to the Mughal emperor. Accordingly, he sent to Shaista Khan a letter of submission and apology and offered to pay a sum of five lakhs and a half as war-indemnity to the viceroy. Shaista Khan was very eager to chastise the Arrakan king. So he agreed to the terms of the Kuch king and "the tribute of the Kuch king reached the imperial court on the 6 December 1665".<sup>1</sup> Till the end of Shaista Khan's rule in Bengal, there was no more trouble between the Kuch kingdom and the Mughal government of Bengal. From a despatch of Shaista Khan to the imperial court on 19 April 1685, we learn: "Modh Narayan the zamindar of Kuch Bihar had promised ten lakhs of rupees as his tribute. But taking advantage of the rainy season, when military operations in that country are impossible, he defaulted in payment. When the monsoon ended, I send my son Iradat Khan (the thanadar, Rangamati) with 5000 horse and 7000 foot to expel him. Modh Narayan opposed him from fort Ekduar, but was defeated and driven to Kuch Bihar fort, which was next attacked and taken by storm.

<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb, III*, p. 218.

The Raja fled away to fort Asham situated on a hill, which will be next attacked by my son. This kingdom yields a revenue of 12 lakhs of rupees."<sup>1</sup> Kuch Bihar was placed in charge of a Mughal faujdar and was in Mughal possession till the end of Aurangzeb's reign.

Next Shaista Khan dealt with the Raja of Jaintia who plundered Mughal territories in Sylhet during Mir Jumla's administration. On hearing of Shaista Khan's arrival in Bengal, the Raja of Jaintia sent him a letter of submission and agreed to pay tribute. The imperial viceroy agreed the terms and allowed the Raja to enjoy his autonomy. But in 1682, the latter broke his pledge and again raided Sylhet. This time, Shaista Khan took stern measures and sent an imperial army to punish the Raja. The latter fled away and the principality of Jaintia was placed in charge of an imperial faujdar.

In 1676 Shaista Khan sent an expedition against another frontier state—Morang (west of Kuch Bihar). Its ruler easily submitted and agreed to pay tribute to the emperor.

Shaista Khan's greatest achievement was the conquest of Chittagong in 1666. This expedition was planned and organised by the viceroy himself and led by his eldest son Buzrug Umed Khan. Shaista Khan evinced his superb managing skill not only in rebuilding the 'nawara' but also in seducing the Feringis of Chittagong in coming over to the Mughal side. He made satisfactory arrangements for the pay and allowances to the Feringis and granted them land for habitation. In fact, the coming over of the Feringis was really the key to the conquest of Chittagong.

#### *Shaista Khan's Private Trade and his Relations with the English*

It is true as Shiahuddin Talish asserts that on coming to Bengal, Shaista Khan in 1664, abolished the trade monopolies ('Sanda-i-khas') of his predecessors. It is also true that he did not openly indulge at first in trade monopolies but within a few years his subordinates recklessly indulged in such trade in order to feed their master's prodigal luxury "by raising money in the old wicked ways and he asked no questions". As has been stated earlier that Shaista Khan's main concern was to amass wealth not only for himself but also for his imperial master who was involved in a life and death struggle with the

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 377.

Marathas in the Deccan. And this he could accomplish only by squeezing the people and the traders alike. In doing so the viceroy and his underlings often came to clash with the English who had been doing good business in the province and this animosity ultimately led to the first Anglo-Mughal war in Bengal in 1686-90.

Principal European traders It is to be noted here that during Shaista Khan's viceroyalty, the English, the Dutch and the Portuguese were the principal European trading concerns in Bengal. Of them, the English had been making considerable headway in Bengal's inland and oversea trade. The English East India Company had established their first factory in Bengal at Hughli in the year 1651. For some years before the establishment of their factory at Hughli, they had been doing their business in Bengal from their factory at Balasore in Orissa which was established in the year 1642. In the beginning their investments in Bengal were very small. The civil war in England (1642-48) during the reign of Charles I and subsequently the war with Holland during Cromwell's rule, brought the English trade in India as well as in Bengal almost to a standstill and the Company's Directors were on the point of winding up their trade and commerce in Bengal. However, with the restoration of peace and order in India after Aurangzeb's final triumph over his rival brothers, the English trade began to develop with much rapidity. "By 1680 the Company's exports from Bengal had risen to £ 150,000 in value and next year to £ 230,000."<sup>1</sup>

But Shaista Khan's private trade threw great impediments and challenge to the trade of the English. Besides, the French and Dutch trade also began to develop. In 1664, the French under the auspices of Colbert, established an East India Company in the hope of participating in the trade which had enriched England and Holland. Soon after, a large french fleet sailed up the Hughli and formed a settlement at Chandernagar. Three years after, the Dutch, whose trade had been confined to Balasore, were permitted to establish a factory at Hughli which they did at Chinsura and where they erected a fortification capable of resisting the local powers. About the same time the Danes entered the river Hughli and embarked in the trade of the country.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that blessed with tranquility and enriched by foreign commerce, Bengal became the most flourishing province of the Mughal empire and the general trade of the English company, which had been

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Marshman, *History of India, I*, p. 209.



drooping for many years, received new impulse. But the viceroy's private trade and the obstructions to English trade at length brought them to an armed clash.

As soon as the news of Shaista Khan's appointment in Bengal became known to the English, the English factors considered it advis-

able to take the earliest opportunity of securing his  
 Shaista Khan's favour and hence they resolved that Blake should  
 parwana to the proceed immediately to call on the viceroy at Rajmahal  
 English with suitable presents for the viceroy and other

eminent persons "by which he (Blake) may be able to mediate and endeavour to redress abuses received and, if possible, to procure an order to command the governor of this place (Hughli) from making any demands in the future for that annual payment of 3,000 rupees and further that he may endeavour to procure this Nabab's general parwana for a free trade as formerly granted by his predecessors . . ."<sup>1</sup> The result of this mission was the procurement of Shaista Khan's parwana whereby he granted the English the privileges they enjoyed formerly in the time of his predecessors. Having obtained the parwana, the English expected to carry on their business without molestation from the viceroy or his subordinates. But soon the English became disillusioned. In the month of May 1664, Charnock, the English factor at Patna, in a letter to the English factors at Hughli apprised them "of the arrival of Shaista Khan's 'daroga' (agent) with a commission to buy 20,000 maunds of salt petre, also orders to forbid the Dutch and the English from giving out any money to the petre-men; and presently he hindered our weighing and receiving of what petre we had formerly given out money for, putting his seal on several places where it lay. . . . Daily persons run away that are the Company's debtors. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Concerning these abuses, the English on several occasions made complaints to Shaista Khan for remedies. But they failed to procure any. "He (Shaista Khan)", observed the English factors at Hughli, "while demands of us 20,000 maunds petre, pretending he hath occasion for said quantity to carry on the King's wars (in the Deccan), now upon our late complaints, in reply, tells us positively that he will not suffer us to weigh, buy or bring down any petre unless we give him in writing engaging ourselves not to sell any goods or silver that our ships may bring into this country unto any person but to him and the prince must be what his agents think or make; and then doth not say we shall have

<sup>1</sup> Foster, *The English Factory Records* (1661-64), pp. 394-95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

liberty to buy the commodity as formerly, but that he will furnish us it. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Charnock warned the English factors at Hughli that unless the warships of the company “could procure a remedy for these abuses from the King, the trade of these parts will be quite lost”.<sup>2</sup> William Blake called on Shaista Khan and procured his ‘dastak’ long since but it was of no avail. The extortions to which the factors were obliged to submit were evidently not exaggerated. Sheldon and Powell wrote from Kasimbazar on 23 June (1664) that a sum of 5,672 rupees had been forced from them on account of the late viceroy’s (Mir Jumla’s) claims against Trevisa. At a consultation held at Hughli on 11 July, it was decided to give 500 rupees to Mirza Sayid Jalal-uddin, the new governor of Hughli, besides presents to his officers and also to direct Powell to go upto Rajmahal to meet the salt-petre boats from Patna and “to pay whatever sum might be requisite to obviate their stoppage there”. It was further decided to remind Shaista Khan of his assurance to Blake that “he would write to the Emperor to remit the annually exacted present of 3,000 rupees”. Like Charnock, William Blake also expressed the same apprehension that the company’s affairs “will be quite ruined if this Nawab lives and reigneth long and the same will be here also, unless they (Mughals) be made to know that we are able to right ourselves when we receive an injury”.<sup>3</sup> The Hughli factors continued to send repeated warnings to the English factors at Surat that if remedies were not secured and the Court of Directors preferred to send annually large stocks to Bengal, the trade would never be profitable to the company, “for we are so far from the court, and governed by so unjust a Nawab, . . . We are not only the sufferers, nor the greatest, the Dutch have their share and all merchants, with the natives”.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Shaista Khan’s agents continued to harass the English at Balasore and his concessions to the Dutch at Balasore put serious obstacles in the way of the English trade. In the opinion of the English factors, it was so done as to secure further presents and gifts from them. Hence a mission headed by John March visited the viceroy at Dacca with a present of about 2,000 rupees in value for the Nawab and distributed gifts to a value of 800 or 1,000 rupees among his principal officers. The presents induced Shaista Khan to forego his intention of obliging the English to pay four per cent customs duty,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 395-96.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, (1665-67), p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

“so they would continue to pay merely 3,000 rupees per annum”.<sup>1</sup> In 1672 the English Company procured a parwana from the viceroy confirming the company’s trade privileges including its exemptions from all customs on their goods. In 1675, the company procured another parwana from him to facilitate its business at Patna. With the approval of the Bengal Council, Job Charnock, the Chief of the Factory, also tried to procure a farman from Aurangzeb by sending a ‘Vakil’ to the imperial court in 1674. But the Vakil’s death on the way and other difficulties made the attempt abortive.

Levy of custom duty In 1674 serious trouble cropped up from a reported order of the emperor for the levy of the customs at the rate of two per cent on all the company’s goods.

In December 1676, the viceroy instructed Malik Zindi, the faujdar of Hughli, to impose two per cent customs duty on the company’s goods. All sorts of obstructions and pressures were resorted to by the Hughli faujdar in order to coerce them to pay the customs. As a result, the company’s business in Hughli practically ceased and which continued upto August 1677 “notwithstanding an order from Shaista Khan in May 1677 to suspend action for the levy of customs till the emperor’s pleasure about it was known”.<sup>2</sup> On 19 of the same month, a copy of Shaista Khan’s parwana suspending the levy of customs was received from Dacca. Even this order did not put an end to the stoppage of the company’s goods and the factory’s business. In spite of strenuous efforts by the English factors at Dacca, Shaista Khan left for Delhi without giving his promised farman for freedom of trade.

Shaista Khan’s private trade was certainly the main reason for his reluctance to allow the English to trade duty-free. Hughli was the nerve-centre of Bengal’s trade and commerce. But as the viceroy obtained Hughli as part of his jagir, he tried to monopolise the trade of that place. Hence in spite of the emperor’s desires, Shaista Khan was reluctant in granting the Europeans a free-trade in Bengal. As Streynsham Master writes : “Since Shaista Khan obtained Hughli as part of his jagir, his servants being made so far governors as to receive all rents, profits, prequisites, fines, customs, etc. of the place, the King’s governor hath little more than the name. . . whilst the Nawab’s officers oppress the people, monopolise most commodities, even as low as grass for beasts, canes, fire-wood, thatch, etc.; nor do they want

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, (1668-69), p. 316.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, (1670-77), p. XXIV.

ways to oppress those people of all sorts who trade whether native or strangers, . . . since whatever they do when complained of to Dacca, is palliated under the name and colour of Nawab's interest; and that the Nawab's officers, may without control drive the trade of that place, there is sent from Dacca or detained out of the rents, 20 or 40 thousand rupees yearly to be employed in merchandise, which is distributed amongst the Hindu merchants of the town, to each in proportion, for which they agree to give 25 per 100 per annum, but are called upon at 6 or 8 months end to make up there accompts and pay the principal and interest so often, it sometimes happens that the merchants pay 30 per 100 to the nawab and governors per annum, draining themselves by this unhappy trade with him. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And yet this was not enough to impoverish the merchants. The governor of Hughli, whenever he had any goods in his hands, called for them and distributed amongst them what quantity he liked at 10 to 15 per cent higher than the market value and they had to pay ready money for the goods.

At Dacca, the imperial officers used to resort to various attempts to enrich themselves as well as to improve the revenues which seriously impaired the trade. There, the weavers were accustomed to pay the Nawab a fixed annual sum of Rs. 1,500 rupees for the right of making and selling their cloth. This sum was increased to above rupees 5,000 in the year 1672 by an order that all cloth should be stamped and should pay a tax of 2 pice in a rupee for each piece instead of the previous practice which required only a gross payment of rupees 1,500. Accordingly, a stoppage of business resulted. The English came to the rescue of the weavers, apprehending that the change would give undue opportunity of delaying the delivery of goods in order to extort money from them. They further apprehended that the same demand might be made on the English and the Dutch for the cloth manufactured by them.

It is evident abundantly from the English factory records that Shaista Khan and his underlings were bent upon monopolising the salt-petre trade of the province in which the European traders had substantial investments. The English factor of Patna, Charnock writes : "Shaista Khan's intentions were to get this whole trade of petre into his hands and so to sell it again to us and the Dutch at this own rates knowing that the ships (of the Europeans) cannot go from the Bay empty. His 'daroga' (agent) hath so abused the merchants that they are almost

<sup>1</sup> S. Master, *Diary, II*, p. 80.

all run away. He (Shaista Khan) pretends that all the petre he buys is for the king. It was never known, he had occasion of more than 1,000 or 1,500 maunds yearly for all his war. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Several times, the viceroy granted the English necessary permission to trade in salt petre freely. But the English practically lost all faith in his promises and assurances. And it is evident in a letter of William Blake, an English factor, addressed to the Surat factors on 4 October 1664 wherein he wrote : “Shaista Khan, who one day, upon receipt of a gift, will grant a person privileges by giving him his parwana, but no sooner gone back from court he will find a means to make said invalid by which he is forced to a further charge. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the exactions of the Mughal officers and their interference with trade especially with the free-merchants greatly handicapped both the English and the Dutch in their trading activities in Bengal. Despite instructions of the emperor, Shaista Khan was never sincere in settling the affairs of the European traders. This state of uncertainty as well as continuous harassment to the English traders ultimately led to the first Anglo-Mughal war in Bengal in (1686-90) during Shaista Khan’s second governorship (1679-1688).

### *Shaista Khan’s War with the English*

“The struggle of the Company,” writes Ascoli, “with the Nazim Shaista Khan for its trading rights is an indication of the important position held by the Bengal viceroys in the machinery of the Mughal empire.”<sup>3</sup> In the English factory records it has been claimed that continual harassment to the English trade by the Mughal officials and the covetousness of the viceroy at last exhausted the patience of the English and they were compelled to resort to arms. Doubtless, against the wishes of the imperial master, Shaista Khan went to war with the English and hence his responsibility could not be ignored. The fact of his close relation with the imperial court, made Shaista Khan arrogant and autocratic in his dealings not only with the imperial officials in Bengal but also with the Europeans. Hence it would be reasonable to suppose that the first Anglo-Mughal war in Bengal was the outcome, to a certain extent, of Shaista Khan’s near-monarchical behaviour.

<sup>1</sup> Foster, *The English Factory Records*, (1661-64), p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399.

<sup>3</sup> F. D. Ascoli, *Early Revenue History of Bengal*, p. 16.

So far as the English are concerned, it is to be noted that they resorted to arms for preserving their ever-increasing trade as well as for securing some territorial gains. As Ascoli has said that "it was not until the governorship of Azimus-Shan that the company gained its first territorial acquisition".<sup>1</sup> In fact, the English had flourishing trade from 1680 onwards. It was their desire to protect this flourishing trade and to obtain a secured-footing against the whims and caprices of the Mughal officials right from the viceroy down to the Mughal sepoys that at last compelled them to use force against the Mughal government in Bengal.

During Shaista Khan's viceroyalty, the English trade and commerce, notwithstanding the alleged oppressions of the viceroy, continued to flourish. Besides their factories at Balasore and Hughli, they had established subordinate factories at Patna, Kasimbazar and Dacca. Their exportation of salt-petre alone in some years amounted to 1000 tons and their "importation of bullion in a single year to 110,0001".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Shaista Khan granted them permission to form a regular establishment of pilots for conducting their ships up and down the river Hughli as well as an order for freedom of trade throughout the province without payment of any duties. The Dutch records of the time also give evidence of the large trade carried on by the English factors. Of course, at the same time, the Dutch records corroborate the fact about the covetousness of Shaista Khan and "his constant endeavour to extract money from all and sundry".<sup>3</sup> In the year 1682, the company, in consideration of the great increase in its Bengal investments and no doubt elated by the receipt of Aurangzeb's farman, made Bengal independent of Madras and despatched William Hedges, one of their Directors, to be the chief Agent or Governor in the Bay of Bengal<sup>4</sup> and subordinated all other factories to Bengal. "His residence" writes Stewart, "was fixed at Hughli and in order to give dignity to the office, a guard of a corporal and twenty European soldiers was sent from Fort St. George, for his protection. This was the first military establishment of the company in Bengal and the foundation of the English in that country."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, *The English Factory Records*, (1661-64), p. 402.

<sup>4</sup> Firminger, *Fifth Report*, p. LIX.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 339.

Hence it was not the frequent extortion of money from the English nor the stoppage to their trade alone that accounted for the war. Varied factors ultimately led to the war.

The most important cause was the vagueness and the obscured style in which the imperial farman was drawn out and it soon gave rise to disputes and involved the affairs of the English in difficulty. The lack of confidence in the imperial farman as well as in the deeds of the Mughal officials in Bengal lay at the root of the trouble.

A dispute arose over the issue of coining. In 1684, the coining was suspended due to the Bengal Council's refusal to comply with the demand of Shaista Khan to sell him all the Company's gold coins (mohurs) at a low rate. However, a crisis was averted after a payment of a considerable sum to the 'daroga' of the viceroy but it left behind a trail of bitterness.<sup>1</sup>

The circumstances, aggravated further by the oppressions of the faujdar of Kasimbazar gave rise to further animosity between the English and the viceroy. At such a juncture, the English thought of abandoning their trade in Bengal altogether or to resort to arms to remedy the wrongs suffered by them. The viceroy, nevertheless, stated the affair in such a light to the emperor as to excite him against the English.

The East India Company censured their agent in Bengal for having been too submissive to the despot and directed the Governor of Fort St. George to make serious efforts to obtain a farman from the emperor permitting the English to occupy one of the un-inhabited islands in the Ganges as well as to fortify the fort of Hijli so that their factors might not be subjected in future to the impositions of the viceroy or his subordinates.<sup>2</sup> But this proposition could not be placed before the emperor.

Soon serious troubles developed over the issue of customs and their payments. Upon his re-appointment as viceroy of Bengal for the second time, Shaista Khan favoured the Company's claim to freedom from customs and he granted necessary parwana in 1680. In that year, there was no interference in the Company's trade but in 1681 controversy arose over the English factor Vincent's practice of issuing passes to Indian merchants for goods which they had bought from the Company and for the goods sent by the Company's servants

<sup>1</sup> Foster, *Op.cit.*, (1678-84), p. XXXII.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 342.

in the course of their private trade. Rai Balchand, the faujdar of Murshidabad stopped several boats in the Ganges that were carrying goods under such passes and he obtained orders from Dacca to levy customs in such cases. The Diwan Haji Safi Khan threatened to put a general stop to the Company's business, unless an undertaking was given to obtain a fresh farman from the emperor clearly freeing the English in Bengal from payment of customs or to abide by other orders as the emperor might issue.<sup>1</sup>

Trouble soon began to develop further. In March 1682, Rai Balchand was appointed Custom-Superintendent at Hughli and he started refusing to issue the usual passes for the boats of the Company. In the following April the government at Dacca had received order from the emperor for the imposition of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent customs on all goods of the Company exported or imported. Rai Balchand, accordingly, prohibited all trade with the Hughli factory, thus stopping its business completely.

Hedges, therefore, decided to go to Dacca to seek a remedy from the viceroy and the diwan Safi Khan. In November 1682, he managed to secure a parwana from Shaista Khan and Hiji Safi Khan suspending the payment of customs for seven months, but this was subject to his giving security for their defrayal, should a farman from Aurangzeb for freedom from customers not be forthcoming within that period. Complications, however, soon ensued. No effective steps were taken to secure the requisite farman from the emperor. Hedges relied on bribing Shaista Khan to write to the emperor for it. However, no communication came from the emperor within the prescribed time and the parwana expired in June 1683. Even before the expiry of the time-limit, Rai Balchand had received a payment on account of customs from Gulabrai, a Dacca merchant with whom Hedges had deposited rupees 20,000 to enable him to give security for the Company. In November 1683, under pressure from Balchand, Hedges consented to pay for two years 1682 to 1683 unless the desired farman was not obtained by the time the Company's ships sailed, i.e. early in 1684.<sup>2</sup>

The stoppage of the Company's business ceased at Hughli in

<sup>1</sup> Foster, *Op.cit.*, (1678-84), p. XXIV.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, *Ibid.*, pp. XXVII-VIII.



November, but in the next month all business was stopped at Kasimbazar. Shaista Khan sent orders for Charnock to appear before him at Dacca. The Bay Council directed Charnock not on any account to go there and the Kasimbazar factory was consequently besieged at the end of the year by Mughal troops. The Malda factory also had constant trouble mainly due to its position outside the town at a place which the factors called Englishbazar. In 1681 Shaista Khan ordered the closure of the factory and in 1684 ordered its demolition.<sup>1</sup>

Further troubles began to develop between the Company and Shaista Khan's government. In 1683, Gangaram, a zamindar of Bihar rebelled and having collected a large force plundered some places and besieged the Mughal fort of Patna. The rebels carried on plundering raids for some days in the neighbourhood of Patna. But the fact that Peacock and other English factors at Patna remained unmolested by the rebels, excited suspicion in the mind of Shaista Khan "as if they were in league with the rebels". Under the viceroy's order, Peacock was thrown into prison and trading in salt-petre was stopped. This incident gave rise to much bitterness among the English factors in Bengal.

At last the English traders lost all patience with "the corrupt and lawless Mughal government". Hedges and others urged upon the Company's Directors "that trade in Bengal would never prosper till they came to a quarrel with the native authorities, got rid of the growing exactions and were established in a defensive settlement with ready access to the sea". The resolution of the Bengal factors was at last accepted by the Court of Directors who obtained the sanction of King James II of England, to retaliate the injuries they had sustained and to reimburse themselves for the loss of their privileges in Bengal by resorting to arms against Shaista Khan and the emperor Aurangzeb.<sup>2</sup> This historic resolution was to bear fruit in the foundation and fortification of Calcutta before the turn of the 17th century.

Accordingly, an expedition was fitted out in England, consisting

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. XXX-III.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 342.

of ten ships of war, carrying from 12 to 70 guns each, under the command of Vice-admiral Nicholson; and on board these ships was embarked a regiment of 600 soldiers, which, on its arrival at Madras, was to be augmented from that garrison, to one thousand men. In 1686 the war-ships with troops left England for India.

Admiral Nicholson was instructed first to proceed to Balasore and having brought away the Company's agents therefrom, he was then to proceed to Chittagong and having taken possession of that part, he was to fortify it in the best possible manner and in order to facilitate this enterprise, the admiral was to enter into an alliance with the king of Arrakan who was a great enemy of the Mughals. The admiral was further instructed to come to terms with the Hindu chiefs or zamindars in the neighbourhood, to establish a mint, to collect revenue and "in short, to render Chittagong a place of arms for the English on the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal as Fort St. George was on the western shore".<sup>1</sup> So far as Bengal was concerned, the plan of the English expedition was to proceed to Dacca from Chittagong and to place before Shaista Khan the following terms: "He (Shaista Khan) should cede the city and territory of Chittagong to the Company and pay the debts due to them by his subjects; that he should allow the rupees coined at Chittagong to pass current in Bengal and restore to the English all the privileges they were entitled to from the farmans of the former emperors; that each party should bear their respective losses and expenses in the war and that this treaty should be ratified by the emperor and the President (of the English nation) at Surat".<sup>2</sup>

But as it might be considered ungenerous to wage a war without sufficient pretext, Nicholson was furnished with letters from the Company, addressed to Shista Khan and to the emperor explaining the grievances the English factors "had sustained by the breach of the farmans under which they had so long acted; by the seizure of their property; and by the repeated extortions made from their agents".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

But the English enterprise was miscarried due to certain unforeseen factors, viz. the fleet was long detained by unfavourable winds and several of the ships, instead of proceeding to Chittagong, entered the western branch of the Ganges and anchored at Hughli. Only three of the ships reached Bengal towards the end of 1686. Meanwhile, the Madras Council despatched 400 soldiers and directed Charnock to raise a contingent of Portuguese infantry to be commanded by the Company's servants.

The arrival of such a force in the Ganges and these preparations for war could not be concealed from Shaista Khan. He offered to come to terms with the English and to submit their dispute to arbitrators appointed by both sides. But, in fact, the viceroy was never sincere in his overtures and concentrated 3000 foot and 300 horses at Hughli to protect the town.<sup>1</sup> The intentions of the Company were also completely frustrated by a petty affray between the troops of the contending parties. When feelings were thus strained on both sides,

it was easy for a small incident to precipitate a major clash. It so happened that on 28 October 1686, three English soldiers of the Hughli factory quarrelled in the bazar with some of the Mughal troops and were severely beaten. As those English troops called out for defence, a second company of them and then the whole English troops arrived on the spot. On the other hand, the Mughal troops who were encamped outside the town also joined their countrymen. As a result a major clash took place and thus the war between the English and the Mughals practically began. The Mughal faujdar Abul Ghani opened fire with his artillery on the English ships and the huts surrounding the English factory were burnt down. Sixty of the Mughal soldiers were killed and a considerable number of them were wounded. During the conflict, Admiral Nicholson opened a cannonade on the town and burnt five hundred houses amongst which was the company's factory. The English ships continued bombarding the town and sending landing parties to sack the town of Hughli. Early in the day the Mughal faujdar fled away in disguise.<sup>2</sup>

The Mughal faujdar sought the assistance of the Dutch merchants of Chinsura and solicited a suspension of the hostilities which was

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Early Annals, I*, pp. 90-96.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97; Stewart, *Op.cit.*, pp. 435-46.

granted on condition of his giving assistance to convey the salt-petre and other goods that might be saved from the conflagration on board the ships, to which the faujdar agreed. Subsequently, at a conference held between the faujdar and Charnock, the former agreed to restore to the English all their privileges of trade until they could obtain a new farman from the emperor. But, in fact, the peace overture of the faujdar was a trick for gaining time to bring reinforcements.

Upon the appraisal of the situation, Shaista Khan at once directed the English factories at Patna, Malda, Dacca and Kasimbazar to be confiscated and sent a considerable reinforcement of infantry and cavalry to Hughli to expel the English therefrom. Before the arrival of the Mughal reinforcements, the English packed their stores and on 20 December (1686) they left Hughli with all their property and sailing down the river for 24 miles halted at Sutanati. From here, Job Charnock continued the negotiations with Shaista Khan. A preliminary treaty, granting particular advantages to the English was agreed upon. But Shaista Khan's intention was to gain time for assembling his troops. Early in the month of February, 1687, the viceroy threw off the mask, sent an army to Hughli and threatened them with total expulsion from the province. Being apprised of the movement of the imperial troops, Job Charnock

considered it unsafe to stay at Sutanati any longer. Hence on 9 February, he left Sutanati and seized the Mughal fort at Thana (modern Garden Reach facing

Matia Burj) and captured the island of Hijli. On their route to Hijli, the English burnt down several magazines of salt and granaries of rice belonging to the Mughal subjects. Also they seized a number of Mughal boats which they found in the river. The English established themselves at Hijli where they pitched their camp and erected batteries on the most accessible parts of the island while their ships were anchored in the mid stream completely commanding the river route.

About the middle of May 1687, Abdus Samad, a Mughal general arrived before Hijli with 12,000 troops to expel the English therefrom.

His heavy batteries fired across the Rosulpur river on the English position in the island and drove their ships from anchorage. On 28 May, a body of Mughal cavalry and gunners crossed the river Rosulpur above Hijli, occupied it and set fire to the town. Meanwhile a severe

Mughal faujdar's  
peace offer

Closure of  
English factories

Hijli seized by  
the English

Mughal attack  
on Hijli

epidemic broke out to which a large number of Mughal troops as well as the English fell victim. The provisions of the English also ran short. Still they bravely continued the fight. At last Abdus Samad sued for peace and in early June, the English abandoned Hijli bag and baggage.<sup>1</sup>

At this critical juncture, overtures of peace were made by Shaista Khan and which were readily accepted by Job Charnock and his Council. Accordingly, hostilities ceased and on 16 August 1687, a treaty was signed whereby the English were allowed to return to all their factories; the customs duty of 3½ per cent was abrogated; they were allowed to erect magazines and to construct docks for their shipping at Uluberia (30 miles south of Calcutta); and they were allowed to resume their trade at Hughli. The only stipulation made on the part of the viceroy was that the English should restore the Mughal ships they had captured and that their war-vessels should never approach Hughli.

But very soon, Shaista Khan had to withdraw his concessions owing to the breakout of hostilities between the English and the Mughal government on the western coast. A year was wasted in this way and in November 1688, the English had to evacuate Calcutta for the second time abandoning all their factories and trade in Bengal.

The news of the total failure of the expedition and the disastrous consequences which ensued, dissatisfied the Directors of the Company. Hence they resolved that “unless a fortification with a district round it, in Bengal to be held as an independent sovereignty, should be ceded to them by the emperor of Hindustan, with permission to coin money which should be current throughout all his dominions, they (company’s servants in Bengal) would no longer carry on any commerce with that country, but annoy him (the emperor) and his subjects by every means in their power”.<sup>2</sup>

With this determination Captain Heath, the new Agent of the English in Bengal (who had superseded Job Charnock) was despatched with 160 soldiers and a few war-vessels to Bengal “either to prosecute the war with vigour or to bring away all the Company’s servants with whatever

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 349.

property might be saved from the general wreck and to land them at Madras".<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Shaista Khan began to oppress the agents of the Company. He ordered them to return and settle at Hugli but not to raise fortifications at Sutanati. At the same time, Shaista Khan's oppressions on the English he ordered his troops to plunder all the property of the English and demanded from Job Charnock a large sum of money as compensation for the damages done to the Mughal government by their hostilities. Job Charnock had neither the means to oppose the viceroy nor money to appease him. Hence the affairs of the English remained in a state of stalemate.

Such was the state of affairs when Captain Heath arrived with his reinforcements. He ordered all the Company's servants to embark with their moveable property at Sutanati and on 8 November he sailed for Balasore. On Heath's arrival near the shore, the Mughal faujdar of Balasore offered to enter into terms with him on behalf of the viceroy. But his offer having been rejected, the faujdar seized two of the Company's factors who resided there and retained them as hostages against any acts of violence. Captain Heath landed with a body of soldiers and mariners, stormed the Mughal fort on 29 November and seized New Balasore town committing unspeakable atrocities on the inhabitants. On 23 December, Captain Heath set sail with his fleet for Chittagong with the object of seizing the town and making it an independent fortified base of the English in the Bay of Bengal. But finding the Mughal garrison much stronger there than they expected, a council of war was held which decided to suspend the hostilities for some time and to write to Shaista Khan stating their grievances and to await his reply. However, after a few days, Captain Heath instead of waiting for the viceroy's reply or endeavouring to seize Chittagong, sailed away for Madras (17 February 1689) abandoning all his Bengal projects.<sup>2</sup>

By this time Shaista Khan had left Bengal (June 1688) and Aurangzeb too was no longer in a mood to continue the war against the English. He pardoned all their faults, removed his armies from Bombay on 27 February 1690 and renewed his farman on the conditions that (1) the English should henceforth follow the ancient customs of the port

Peace with English, 1690

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, pp. 351-52.

and behave themselves for the future no more in such a shameful manner, (2) a fine of Rs. 1,50,000 be given him, (3) Sir Joshia Child be turned out and expelled from India, (4) satisfaction should be given to his subjects on account of debts contracted and (5) all losses and damaged to be made good.

The news of the disturbances caused by the English at Hughli and Balasore highly infuriated the emperor. He exclaimed, "the English had greatly abused him, spoiled his country". Yet he restored them to their former privileges in Bengal. The principal demands in the original petition were for custom-free trade, establishment of a government mint at Hughli and for the lease of Uluberia to build a factory on the same privileges as the Dutch had at Baranagar. The custom was commuted by a single payment of Rs. 3,000 per annum; a mint for their use was established at Hughli and the village of Uluberia was granted to them for building a factory. Later on they removed their establishment to Sutanati. The emperor issued orders for conciliating the English and restoring their trade which made a fair addition to the imperial customs revenue. As ordered by the emperor, the next governor of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan, invited Job Charnock to return and re-establish all the Company's factories. He assured the Madras Council that the English would be placed on a footing with the most favoured foreign nation. The Madras Council replied that they could not accept the proposal unless the emperor would grant to the Company a specific farman for Bengal, stating clearly the terms upon which they were in future to carry on their trade. A second letter was written by Ibrahim Khan to Job Charnock informing him that he had addressed to emperor for the desired farman. Assured of the viceroy's friendship and protection, Job Charnock with his council and factors arrived at Sutanati on 24 August 1690.<sup>1</sup> This was the foundation of Calcutta. Meanwhile, the viceroy forwarded to Charnock the emperor's farman authorising the English to trade in Bengal without paying any other duty than an annual present of 3,000 rupees. Thus the hostilities came to an end and the English got a secured footing in Bengal after many vicissitudes of fortune.

#### *An Estimate of Shaista Khan's Character and Achievements*

Shaista Khan, a son of Asaf Khan and a brother of Mumtaz Mahal, was Mughal viceroy of Bengal for a quarter of a century with a short

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

break. His death was much regretted by the emperor and a numerous circle of friends. Charles Stewart writes : "By the Muhammadan historians, Shaista Khan is described as the pattern of excellence; but by the English he is vilified as the oppressor of human race." In another place Stewart writes : "Shaista Khan governed Bengal with generosity, justice and care for the welfare of the peasantry. He granted villages and plots of land, free of revenue to the widows of respectable men, to persons of good birth and indigent. . . ." He, was doubtless, generous by temperament and profligate by nature and spent a huge amount on the maintenance of his numerous harem. He lived in almost royal style of luxury and splendour. When came to Bengal, he was a tired old man "very old and very feeble", but that did not prevent him from having a son born to him at the age of 82. Although in youth, he was remarkable for his military capacity and vigour, in Bengal, he spent his days in ease and pleasure amidst his numerous harem. "In fact, Shaista Khan's fame in Bengal was due to the easy oriental way of gaining popularity with the vulgar—by living in a regal style of pomp and prodigality, supporting a vast parasite class of useless servants and hangers on and practising indiscriminate charity to an army of pretended saints and theologians, loafers calling themselves religious mendicants and decayed scions of good families who had learnt no trade or honest means of livelihood. This is exactly the picture that we get of his policy when we rightly interpret Shihabuddin Talish's uncontrolled eulogy of Shaista Khan's truly noble and generous soul."<sup>1</sup> He was extremely an extravagant man and his costly edifices at Dacca and enormous amount of presents bear eloquent testimony of his extravagance which could be maintained by grinding the masses. According to some European writers, Shaista Khan was an oppressor of human race. While according to others, he was a great benefactor. As Manucci writes : "Shaista Khan was a man of ripe judgment, very wealthy and powerful and of good reputation, for he was very charitable, distributing every year in alms 50 thousand rupees. For this purpose, in each of the principal cities of the empire, he employed officials who looked after the daily gifts of food and clothes to the most necessitous of the poor and succoured the widows and the orphans . . . . He was very found of Europeans, above all of the priests, he was loved and respected by everyone . . . ."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, II*, p. 322.



Shaista Khan was held in high esteem by emperor Aurangzeb who lavished on him high privileges and semi-regal honours. With all his greatness, Shaista Khan was meek and humble, covetous and affable, just and liberal, brave, noble and enlightened.<sup>1</sup> He administered justice personally and so far as his subjects were concerned he was careful in imparting impartial justice. The Qazis were appointed on merit and integrity of character.

It is true, the traders dreaded Shaista Khan much for his covetousness and oppression on them, but at the same time, they lamented his death too. As Marshman writes : "Shaista Khan is charged by the factors of the company with insatiable rapacity, (yet), they did not deny that he fostered their commerce and obtained many favours for them from Delhi."<sup>2</sup> Despite Shaista Khan's rapacity, "his administration was remarkable for its manifold activities and achievement and it proved peculiarly eventful in regard to the condition and prospects of the European traders—more especially of the English."<sup>3</sup> Shaista Khan forms a prominent figure in connection with the early commercial enterprises of the English East India Company.

From the political point of view, Shaista Khan's governorship forms an important chapter in the Mughal annals in Bengal as during his time imperial rule was firmly established in Kuch Bihar and Chittagong was conquered and annexed to the Mughal empire. The conquest of Chittagong was Shaista Khan's greatest military achievement in Bengal as it completely suppressed the Magh-Feringi pirates and thereby assured peace and security in the coastal region of Bengal.

The *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (p. 368) is highly eulogistic in praise of Shaista Khan. It says that he established numerous caravan serais and erected numerous bridges throughout the province. During his governorship many useful public works such as serais, bridges and roads were constructed and the economic and agricultural condition of the people attained an unique degree of prosperity. Traces of the beneficent administration of Shaista Khan are known not only in Bengal but throughout India. As Stewart writes : "His (Shaista Khan's) memory is to this day spoken of with the highest respect in that province. It is related that during his government, grain was so cheap that rice was sold at the rate of 740 lbs (i.e. eight maunds) weight for the rupee; to

Useful public works

<sup>1</sup> Marshman, *History of India*, I, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> S. Husain, *Echoes from Old Dacca, vide, Bengal—Past and Present*, III, p. 219.

commemorate which event, as he was leaving Dacca, he ordered the western gate through which he departed, to be built up and an inscription to be placed thereon, interdicting any future governor from opening it, till he had reduced the price of grain to the same rate; in consequence of which injunction, the gate remained closed till the government of Nawab Sarfaraz Khan.”<sup>1</sup>

Shaista Khan was also a great builder. Several of the public buildings created by him are still to be seen at Dacca. In a land where no building stone and hard wood were available, all structures had to be built of brick with lime mortar. As Charles D'Oyly has observed : “In the climate of Dacca, alternately humid with excessive rains and the floods of the Ganges, and glowing with the fervors of an Indian sun, vegetation is rapid and abundant. If a bird drop a seed or the wind waft one where it may find permanent lodgement among the chinks of a building, it presently puts forth fibres which soon become roots and branches . . . . The mosque of Saif Khan has thus been overcanopied with the foliage of the banian, which will one day perhaps bury it in the depth of forest gloom. . . . It was originally surmounted by three domes, but during the rainy season of the year 1811, the damps and storms co-operating with the superincumbent weight of foliage, drove in the roof.”<sup>2</sup> The palace of Shaista Khan was magnificent both in structure as well as in architectural design. Tavernier, who visited Dacca in 1666 wrote : “As for the residence of the Governor, it is enclosed by high walls, in the midst of which there is a place constructed entirely of wood. It is usual to reside under tents, pitched in a large court within the enclosure.” The noted of the public buildings were—the Great Katra, the Mosque of Safi Khan, the Mosque on the Buriganga, the Small Katra, the palace of Lal Bagh, the stately mosque of the Husaini Dalan, etc.

“As a viceroy of a Mughal province,” writes Bradley, “he stands out beyond his contemporaries. Above all things, he gave a distracted country the peace and quietness it so much needed. Not since the Mussalman first came to Bengal had the province enjoyed so long a rest and the blessings of peace in those days conferred a distinction upon the giver that later days cannot wholly appreciate. His rule was the period of Dacca’s greatest prosperity. Noble buildings,

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 388.

designed and executed with all the skill of Mussalman art, rose to beautify the city. The marble tomb and mausoleum that he erected over his favourite daughter, Peri (Piyari) Bibi, shorn as it has been of much of its glory, still remains the most beautiful Mussalman monument in all Eastern Bengal. No other viceroy or governor has so impressed his memory upon Dacca. It is truly the city of Shaista Khan."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bradley, Birt, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, pp. 26-27.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONSOLIDATION OF MUGHAL POWER, 1656-1700

#### (A Short Political Survey)

The first half century of Mughal rule is a significant epoch in the annals of medieval Bengal. But it was not a glorious age nor even a happy one. While the Mughals conquered the whole of northern India in less than a quarter of a century after Akbar's accession, it took the Mughals about half a century to conquer a single province Bengal.

After the extinction of the Afghan empire with the accession of Akbar, the Mughal-Afghan contest for political supremacy assumed a dangerous proportion in the eastern provinces.

During Akbar's reign While the Mughals were preoccupied with territorial expansion in northern India, the Karranis, a branch of the Afghans, set up an independent kingdom in Bengal. The Karrani dynasty under its two able rulers, Taj Karrani and Sulaiman Karrani very prudently managed to maintain their independence in Bengal by keeping the Mughal generals posted on the western border of Bengal in good humour by means of costly presents as well as by informally acknowledging the suzerainty of the emperor Akbar. But the trouble between the Mughals and the Karranis began when Daud Karrani, son and successor of Sulaiman, cast off the Karrani dynasty's allegiance to the Mughal emperor and declared his own independence. So long the Mughals, satisfied with the nominal submission of the Karrani rulers, made no attempt to push into Bengal. But Daud Karrani's imprudent step at once invited Mughal invasion upon Bengal. In 1574, after Daud's defeat near the Teliagarhi pass, the Mughals under their general Munim Khan entered Tanda, the capital of the province.

The Bengal capital, though occupied, it took the Mughals many years to subjugate the whole province and to impose imperial peace. Daud fled away to Orissa and his Afghan veterans fell scattered in the province and wherever they went they raised disturbances. Munim Khan, the first imperial general and governor appointed in Bengal by Akbar, consolidated his authority in the capital and set in order the political and financial matters. Mughal detachments were sent to different regions to crush the Afghan opposition and to consolidate

imperial authority. The Afghans could not stand and in the west, north-central and south Bengal, no Afghan power of consequence was left to trouble the imperialists. Of course, no Mughal administration was instituted in any of the occupied regions upto then. Daud Khan was again defeated in March 1575 and he submitted to the Mughals. Orissa was given to Daud as his jagir.

The battle of Tukaroi (March 1575) is a turning point in the history of Bengal. With the fall of Daud Karrani, the disruptive elements became very active which took long time to be crushed by the imperialists. Daud Khan's submission to the Mughals proclaimed the *de jure* annexation of Bengal to Akbar's empire. But truly speaking, introduction of a regular imperial administration and imposition of imperial peace in Bengal was still far off. Bengal lost its political cohesion and for many years the province suffered from confusion and anarchy. It should not be supposed that Bihar and Bengal as a whole came under imperial domination. In fact, a few towns in Bihar and fewer still in Bengal were held by the imperial military officials and even in them the imperial authority was not properly imposed. Disruptive elements were rampant everywhere which made the prospect of a regular government impossible and which sometimes threatened the very existence of the loosely established imperial power. Moreover, the absence of a strong central government encouraged the local landlords to encroach upon each other's domains and thereby making the prospect of imperial consolidation extremely difficult, while the discredited and still unsubdued Afghans were looking for their new abodes in the provinces of Bengal and Bihar. It is to be noted further, that the task of consolidation might have been easier, had not the imperial officers and soldiers in Bengal risen to open rebellion from time to time.

The period between 1575 and 1605 was a period of conquering generals who were more interested in expanding the imperial sway rather than in consolidating the imperial authority. Murim Khan's death in the midst of political uncertainties, gave a signal for fresh troubles. On being left leaderless, the surviving Mughal officials and soldiers abandoned Bengal altogether retreating to Bhagalpur enroute to Delhi. Khan-i-Jahan, the next Mughal general and governor of Bengal succeeded in crushing the Afghan malcontents as well as in recovering Bengal. After consolidating the imperial authority in Western Bengal, Khan-i-Jahan (1576-78) led his maiden Bhati campaign against Isa Khan. But ultimately it ended in disaster.

Next Mughal governor Muzaffar Khan could not rise equal to the occasion. His administration was doomed to tragic failure. His habitual wavering and want of tact aggravated the situation. His rule of two years (1579-80) ended in his murder at the hands of his now mutinous officers. The Mughal empire had now reached a most important stage in its evolution. Emperor Akbar clearly understood that the age of conquest was over and that a regular administration in the conquered region must begin. But Muzaffar Khan's tactlessness frustrated the emperor's design for the time being. The mutinous imperial officers cut off Bengal from the empire of Akbar. For the next three years (1780-83) confusion and anarchy reigned supreme in the province. The next governor Azam Khan (1582-83) made strenuous efforts to recover the province from the hands of the rebel imperial officers and the Afghans who now threw a great challenge to the imperialists under their leader Qatlu Lohani. Azam Khan reconquered Bengal for the third time in 1583 but he could not consolidate the imperial power as he was suddenly transferred from the province. Next Mughal governor Shahbaz Khan (1583-84) relived Tanda from the hands of the Afghan rebels and after consolidating imperial authority in and around Tanda, he proceeded against Isa Khan of Bhati. Though Shahbaz Khan achieved initial success, his violent temper and inordinate pride alienated the local people and made his subordinates discontented. This encouraged Isa Khan and his Afghan accomplices. They made a violent attack upon the imperialists. Shahbaz was forced to retreat. Shahbaz's cowardice lowered the position of the imperialists in the eyes of the local people of Bengal. However, Isa Khan came to terms with the imperialists. In the words of Abul Fazl : "The conquest now extended up to the port of Satgaon and things were satisfactorily arranged." Doubtless, by 1587, the *de jure* authority of the imperial government over all Bengal was acknowledged. With the year 1587, a new chapter opened in the annals of Bengal. With a view to consolidate the authority of the Mughals in Bengal, Akbar by a royal decree ordered the institution of suba system of government in Bengal with a viceroy and a uniform cadre of official heads. But unfortunately, the province was not yet ready to accept such a peaceful and settled government.

Man Singh's governorship (1590-1604), first in Bihar and then in Bengal bore some fruits so far as the consolidation of imperial power in the eastern provinces is concerned. After subduing the

refractory landlords of Bihar as well as the Afghan rebels in Orissa, Man Singh set himself in expanding as well as consolidating imperial sway in Bengal. In 1594, Akbar sent Man Singh off to Bengal with many wise counsels as to the administrative policy to be followed there. During his governorship, Bhusna was conquered and much of Isa Khan's territories fell into Mughal hands. It was during his tenure of office, that the imperial authority in Bengal for the first time came into contact with the frontier kingdom of Kuch Bihar which was turned into a vassal state on Bengal's north-eastern frontier. Like Isa Khan of Sonargaon, Kedar Rai of Sripur was a formidable enemy of the Mughals. For the consolidation of the imperial power in eastern Bengal, Kedar Rai was required to be crushed. The expedition against Kedar Rai was successful and Sripur was turned into an imperial outpost. With the death of Kedar Rai, the flames of disturbance in deltaic Bengal were quenched. With a view to maintain imperial authority squarely over those provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orrisa, Man Singh transferred the seat of government from Tanda to Rajmahal.

Even towards the close of Akbar's reign, imperial authority in Bengal was not fully consolidated. The work of consolidation really began in the reign of Jahangir. The reign of Akbar and the first eight years of Jahangir's reign were an age of conquering generals who were more interested in expanding the imperial sway than in consolidating what they had conquered. The Bengal's governors of Akbar's time contended themselves with securing nominal submission of the independent Afghan and Hindu landlords and made no serious attempts to subjugate them and bring them under the direct control of the government. Due to continuous warfare and progress and retreat of the imperialists as well as frequent mutiny in the imperial camp, it was not at all possible to organise a peaceful government. Till the close of Akbar's reign, Bengal, in fact, was not ready to accept and work a settled civil government. Although Bengal was officially made a province of the Mughal empire, the effective control of the emperor was confined to narrow limits and did not stretch far beyond the capital city and the few fortified posts set up by the imperial commanders. In fact, the Mughals were living in armed camps at the close of Akbar's reign. It was in the reign of Jahangir that serious attempts were made to annex the province to the empire thoroughly and to impose a uniform administrative system over the whole territory.

During the first eight years of Jahangir's reign, the process of conquest and consolidation went on speedily. Like the Afghan veterans and underlings of Daud Karrani during Akbar's reign, the independent Afghan and Hindu landlords, the Twelve Bhuiyas being the most important of them, stood in the way of annexation and consolidation. These prominent landlords almost parcelled out Bengal amongst themselves and it took the Mughals long eight years to crush their pretension of independence. The task of conquest and consolidation was rendered more complicated due to immense difficulties arising out of the nature of the province and its peculiar geography. The adverse influence of physical features was felt more intensely in conducting military operations. The Magh-Feringi inroads also constituted another difficulty in the way of consolidation and imperial peace.

It was Islam Khan, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal (1608-1613) who was bent upon putting down the Bengal landlords and imposing imperial authority over the whole province and to this he succeeded to a remarkable degree. The principal landlords of Bengal like Bir Hamir of Bankura-Bishnupur, Shams Khan of Pachet, Salim Khan of Hijli, Majlis Qutub of Faridpur, Musa Khan of Sonargaon, Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, Raja Ramchandra of Bakla, Lakshman Manikya of Bhulua, Bayizid Karrani of Sylhet and Khwaja Usman of Bokainagar—one by one courted defeat and their principalities were thoroughly annexed to the empire and imperial officers were posted in the annexed territories who organised a settled civil government. The war-boats of these landlords were seized and their contingents were disbanded.

It was during the viceroyalty of Islam Khan that imperial arms were extended to the frontier Hindu kingdoms like Kachar, Kuch Bihar and Kamrup. After the conquest and annexation of Sylhet, an imperial army invaded Kachar whose ruler Satrudaman offered a stubborn resistance. On the fall of the two strongholds, the Kachar king offered to come to terms and accordingly a peace was concluded with him. But Islam Kahn's plan was thwarted by an interference for the first time from the emperor on account of the viceroy's autocratic and arrogant conduct. Moreover, the viceroy failed to make effective the 17-point imperial farman regarding the code of conduct to be observed by the imperial officials in Bengal. This imperial farman was a definite bid on the part of the imperial court to assume the emperor's



control and hold over the provincial officials. Islam Khan's indifference to the said imperial decree brought a sharp rebuke from the emperor and hence the latter ordered Islam Khan to renew the Kachar campaign which the viceroy was forced to obey. Alarmed at the determined attitude of the imperialists, Raja Satrudaman definitely tendered his submission and agreed to pay tribute. It is to be noted that the Kachar king was in league with the rebel Afghans of Sylhet and hence the punishment of the Raja was felt necessary. The Mughal success in Kachar considerably improved their position in Sylhet as the Kachar prince never dared fomenting the anti-Mughal elements in Sylhet.

As has been told earlier that the Kuch Bihar kingdom was turned into a tributary vassal state by Islam Khan without absorbing it completely into the Pax-Mughalia. But the kingdom of Kamrup under Raja Parikshit still remained unsubdued. Besides, the alliance between Raja Parikshit and the rulers of the Ahom kingdom remained a constant threat to the peace and security of Bengal. Hence for the sake of consolidating Mughal authority in the north-eastern frontier of Bengal, Islam Khan fitted out an expedition against Kamrup in 1613. After a strenuous fighting for a few months, Raja Parikshit surrendered all his belongings, his war elephants and his kingdom to the imperialists. Thus Kamrup lost its short existence as an independent state and was thoroughly annexed to the Mughal empire. The frontier of Mughal empire was not only extended upto the Barnadi in the north-east, but also was well consolidated. The conquest of Kamrup was Islam Khan's one of the greatest achievements as viceroy of Bengal. "It was Islam Khan who really conquered Bengal, organised a unified administrative system and established the Mughal peace in the country. From this standpoint, he should be regarded as one of the makers of the Mughal empire and the greatest viceroy of the Bengal Subah."<sup>1</sup>

Islam Khan was succeeded as viceroy of Bengal by his younger brother Qasim Khan who ruled the province for three years (1614-1616). Bengal required a ruler of exceptional ability to work out a peaceful settled government as well as to establish peace and security firmly. But Qasim Khan's arrogance, autocratic instincts, violence of temper, greed for wealth and above all his quarrelsome habit not only deprived him of the advice and co-operation of his subordinates but

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<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 288.

also created enormous difficulties for the Mughal government in Bengal. Hence Qasim Khan's rule proved to be absolutely fruitless. Internal revolts in Kamrup engrossed the attention of the viceroy and the expeditions against the kingdoms of Assam and Arrakan ended in disaster. The imperial administration was yet to be established. In the annexed territories, the people were yet to be pacified and revenue to be collected. Moreover, the inroads of the Maghs and Feringi pirates were growing more serious, more frequent and more penetrating. They were to be properly checked and peace and security assured in the coastal region. But unfortunately the new viceroy frittered away his energy in quarrelling with his subordinates and thereby antagonising the latter. Qasim Khan alienated the diwan, the bakshi and the waqanavis and all the three lodged a complaint with the imperial court against the former. The result was emperor's intervention and the viceroy was sharply censured.

For consolidating the imperial position in the frontier states of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup, the people there were required to be pacified and assured of their security. But instead of doing anything in this direction, Qasim Khan provoked the subjects of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup to rebellion by depriving Lakshminarayan and Parikshit, the kings of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup respectively of their personal liberty and by putting them under close confinement in clear contravention of the pledge given to them by Islam Khan. As a protest against this action of the viceroy, the people of these two states rose up in arms which endangered the newly established Mughal rule in the north-eastern frontier. The anti-Mughal elements became active once again which posed a challenge to the imperial government in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> However, after much difficulty, the trouble was quelled. †

During the viceroyalty of Islam Khan, the king of Kachar submitted to the Mughals and agreed to pay tributes. But during the interregnum, the Kachar king shook off his allegiance to the imperial government and thus again posed a great threat to the imperial authority in Sylhet. Hence, Qasim Khan sent an army against Kachar. The Kachar king Satrudaman offered a stiff resistance causing heavy loss of men on the imperial side. However, after a stiff fighting for a few days, Satrudaman sued for peace offering more favourable terms. He surrendered the frontier fort of Asuratekar, reaffirmed his allegiance to the emperor and a tribute of one lakh of rupees in cash. Unfortunately

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<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, pp. 300-301.

in the midst of the parleys, the imperial commandar Mubariz died which created much confusion in the imperial camp. The imperialists, on being leaderless, hastily evacuated the fortress of Asuratekar and retreated to Sylhet. Thus the Kachar campaign again ended in disaster and the Kachar king regained his independence. The failure of the Kachar campaign led to confusion in the administration of Sylhet and the anti-Mughal forces became once more active. However a Mughal contingent detached from Dacca succeeded in restoring order in Sylhet. The temporary disturbances in Sylhet bear evidence to the fact that the imperial authority was not wholly consolidated there uptil then.

Taking the advantage of the weakness and lack of vigilance on the part of Qasim Khan, the two prominent landlords of western Bengal, Bir Hamir and Shams Khan broke away from Delhi's vassalage by open revolt and thereby threatened the imperial rule in that border region of Bengal. Although an imperial army was sent against the rebel landlords, it did not lead to any tangible result due to the antipathy of the viceroy against the imperial commander. Encouraged at the half-hearted action against the rebel landlords, another landlord of Birbhum, Bahadur Khan, revolted. The situation in the entire region comprising the districts of Bankura and Birbhum thus remained unsettled till the close of Qasim Khan's viceroyalty.

The Arrakanese invasion of Bhulua (1614-15) though unsuccessful, indicated a great threat to peace and security. The thanadar of Bhulua, Abdul Wahid instead of resisting the raiders, left his post leaving the Arrakan king and his Feringi ally masters of the situation. The ease with which the raiders plundered the entire region bears evidence of the utter impotency of the imperial administration in that strategic region. However, the Arrakanese could not proceed further and retreated hastily. "That the Mughals came unscathed out of this great ordeal was solely due to an act of Providence."<sup>1</sup> The failure on the part of the viceroy to strengthen the defences of Bhulua brought sharp reprimands from the emperor. In order to strengthen the administration of the subah, the emperor decided to send a new diwan with the same rank as the subahdar, so that the former could act independently of the subahdar as well as could serve as a check on the whims and caprices of the subahdar. Further, the new diwan was given a free hand in the selection of the bakshi and waqa-navis,

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<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 293.

so that the latter three could serve as a counterpoise to the subahdar. Accordingly, the emperor sent Mukhlis Khan as a new diwan to Bengal. This appointment went a step further in the work of consolidating imperial authority in Bengal. Further the intervention of the emperor in the affairs of Bengal bears testimony of the anxiety of the imperial court to exert and assert its control over the provincial administration.

During Qasim Khan's viceroyalty, the Mughals suffered two serious setbacks. The Assam campaign (1615) ended in a disastrous failure. "The losses in men and money were heavy, but heavier still was the moral loss—loss in military prestige and political power."<sup>1</sup>

Another disaster was the Chittagong expedition (1616). With a view to recover his personal prestige, Qasim Khan launched another aggressive expedition against the Arrakan king. The hazards of the jungle campaign and the lack of experience and judgment on the part of the Mughal commander brought disaster on the imperialist. Thus the expedition proved a complete failure.

The repeated failure of the imperial arms disturbed internal order. The rebellion in Kamrup almost became chronic and most of the punitive expeditions against the rebel landlords of western Bengal also failed in their object. The emperor became thoroughly disgusted with his incompetent foster-brother Qasim Khan. The latter was recalled and Ibrahim Khan was sent to Bengal as governor.

The period of Ibrahim Khan's viceroyalty for a period of 6 years (1617-1623) is marked by peace and tranquility unknown before. For the first time since the Mughal conquest, the people of the province settled down to enjoy the blessings of peace, security and even economic prosperity. His conciliatory policy towards the zamindars had a beneficent effect. Though the new viceroy had to face more than one attack of the Ahom king and his protege Balinarayan of Kamrup Bengal as a whole remained immune from any serious threat from without and revolt from within till the march of the rebel prince Shah Jahan upon Bengal in 1623. The repeated incursions of the Magh-Feringi pirates did not pose any serious challenge to the Mughal government in Bengal. Although the disturbing factors were few in number, their cumulative effect was not altogether insignificant. An expedition had to be fitted out against Bir Bhan of Chandrakona who "had been causing great annoyance to travellers passing by his territories". The revolt of Ibrahim Krori, an imperial officer in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

Kamrup, posed a great threat to the imperial authority there for some time. In 1621, a revolt of the zamindar of Hijli, Bahadur Khan, assumed a formidable character who was ultimately disarmed after much difficulty. In the middle of 1618, Madhusudan, a newpew of Raja Lakshminarayan, rose up in arms and seized a Mughal pargana on the border of Kamrup. Madhusudan in alliance with Balinarayan wrought havoc in the border of Kuch Bihar and Kamrup. However, the revolt was crushed and in pursuance of his liberal policy, Ibrahim Khan treated the new vassal kindly and impressed him into imperial service in Kamrup.

In order to secure a suitable base for a military operation against the king of Arrakan, Ibrahim Khan under the emperor's order had to launch an expedition against Tippera in 1618. After two years of fighting Tippera was conquered and annexed to the Mughal empire. After the conquest, peace and tranquility reigned in Bengal and the Mughals secured a valuable base against the Maghs. Udaipur, Tippera's capital was turned into a Mughal outpost in charge of a Mughal commander.

In 1624, a violent storm suddenly burst over Bengal when the rebel prince Shah Jahan seized Bengal temporarily. "...Bengal, on account of its peculiar physical features, geographical isolation, rich natural resources coupled with its chronic political confusion, had afforded a tempting field to many a daring adventurer and an asylum to many a political refugee."<sup>1</sup> The internal and external situation appeared to be inviting to the rebel prince. He found a ready ally in the discontented elements and the constant enemies of the Mughal empire, viz. the Maghs and the Feringis. The rebel prince made a common cause with these anti-Mughal forces and won over the Portuguese settlers in Bengal by a promise of trade facilities. The Bengal viceroy, though devoted to the cause of the emperor till his death, failed to take effective steps to check the progress of the rebel prince. In fact, Ibrahim Khan's inaction accounted for Shah Jahan's almost triumphant entry into Rajmahal. After a stiff resistance in which Ibrahim Khan displayed personal bravery and steadfastness remarkably, the imperial army was completely routed and the viceroy himself fell in the battle-field almost unrecognised. Bengal was lost to the empire. It was recovered only after the retirement of the rebel prince finally from the

Shah Jahan's  
rebellion

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

province in February 1625. The impact of the rebel prince's success was enormous on the administration of the subah which became topsy-turvy. The restoration of Jahangir's rule and the viceroyalty of Mahabat Khan brought in little improvement in the situation. The last governor of Bengal to be appointed by Jahangir was Fidai Khan who ruled the province from the middle of 1627 to February 1628. His one significant act was the stipulation "to remit yearly from Bengal in the shape of presents, a sum of five lakhs for the Emperor and an equal amount for the Queen-consort Nurjehan". Gradually tranquility was returning to the province and with it economic stability.

From the point of view of conquest and consolidation, Jahangir's reign proved to be a formative period of Bengal history. Owing to the exertions of the viceroys of this period, the whole of Bengal was brought under effective control of the imperial government and "the province had attained a geographical and political unity unknown for a long time before." It was at the close of Jahangir's reign that the Mughal government in Bengal came into direct contact with the two powerful frontier kingdoms, the Ahom kingdom on the north-east and the Arrakan kingdom on the south-east. It was during the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb that severe and prolonged warfare with these two frontier states continued.

The process of conquest and consolidation continued during the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Throughout this period, the province enjoyed peace within which was not disturbed by any rebellion excepting that of Shova Singh nor by any foreign invasion. On the other hand, imperial expansion in the northern and southern frontiers continued. The internal peace was largely due to the fact that during the 80 years that covered the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, Bengal was ruled by viceroys directly connected with the imperial family. Hence the position of these viceroys was much stronger than their predecessors and they could enforce obedience in full confidence of being backed by the emperors. The viceroys of Bengal during this period were Qasim Khan (1628-1632) who married Nurjehan's sister and thus related to the imperial family, Azam Khan Baqar (1632-1635), Islam Khan (1632-1635), Prince Muhammad Shuja (1639-1559), Mir Jumla (1660-1663), Shaista Khan (1663-1678), Fidai Khan (1678), Prince Muhammad Azam (1678-1679), Shaista Khan (1679-1688), Khan-i-Jahan (1688-

During the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb

1689), Ibrahim Khan (1689-1698), and Prince Azim-us-Shan (1698 till the end of Aurangzeb's reign).

During the reign of Shah Jahan, there were three occurrences of importance, viz. the capture of Hughli from the Portuguese, the invasion of Assam and the war of succession among the sons of Shah Jahan. As has been told earlier that the growth of the Portuguese colony of Hughli gave rise to much suspicion and apprehension in the mind of the emperor Shah Jahan. The growing population and armament of Hughli and the superiority of the Portuguese in the use of fire-arms threatened the creation of an imperium in imperio in Bengal and the emperor "could not but conceive great fears lest His Majesty of Spain should possess himself of the kingdom of Bengal". Hence under the emperor's order, the Bengal viceroy Qasim Khan made an attack upon Hughli and expelled them bag and baggage therefrom in 1632. The port of Hughli thus passed into the hands of the Mughal government and thereby Mughal power became consolidated along the coast of the Hughli river.

The Ahom war of Shah Jahan's reign was not the outcome of any imperialistic design. It was aimed at defending and re-consolidating imperial authority in Kamrup. The aggressive designs of the Ahom king, Pratap Singh, on the frontiers of Kamrup and the Ahom state and the latter's intrigue with the neighboring landlords who severed their loyalty to the Mughal sovereign created a very difficult situation in the Mughal occupied Kamrup. Moreover, the anti-Mughal alliance between Balinarayan, the younger brother of Raja Parikshit of Kamrup and the Ahom king Pratap Singh posed a great challenge to the imperial authority in Kamrup. Hence with a view to frustrate the ambitious designs of the Ahom king as well as to assure the security of Kamrup, Shah Jahan ordered the Bengal viceroy to launch an attack upon the Ahom state. The war continued for about a year (1637-38) which ultimately led to the final expulsion of the Ahoms from the whole of Kuch-Hajo and the seizure of the Ahom fort of Kajali. The work of pacification next followed. A new revenue settlement was made with the local landlords and thus the imperial hold over Kamrup was re-assured.

While the Mughal army was thus involved in a serious conflict, a violent storm burst over south-east Bengal by the attack of the Arrakanese on Dacca and Noakhali districts in the year 1638. But luckily for the Mughals, the Portuguese of Chittagong deserted to the Mughals and hence the Arrakanese dared not face the Mughals by

assuming the offensive. In the wake of the desertion of the Portuguese, came a large number of Bengalis who were being held in slavery by the Maghs and Feringis in Chittagong.

Prince Shuja's viceroyalty was a long period of peace for the subah of Bengal. He himself lived at Rajmahal while a deputy governed lower Bengal from Dacca. The province of Orissa was also added to Shuja's charge and thus the old Presidency of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa as known in British Indian history was first formed in Shuja's time. As his position was just next to the emperor, Shuja could awe intending rebels into submission and there was not any serious internal rebellion or any foreign invasions during his viceroyalty. In a letter to the emperor in 1655, Shuja could boast of his administrative success thus : "The zaminders of Morang, Kacha, and other places who had never paid tribute to any of my predecessors, have sent me ambassadors with letters of professing loyalty and obedience and some elephants by way of present. I have promoted cultivation in both the subahs. Orissa which had been desolated by the oppression of my predecessors, has now turned its face to improvement."<sup>1</sup> Towards the close of Shah Jahan's reign, as Prince Shuja became involved in the war of succession, the administration of the province almost collapsed and anarchy ensued. Due to Shuja's acquisition of wealth for himself, the provincial exchequer became completely bankrupt and hence the administration suffered greatly. The confusion in Bengal administration was ended only after Mir Jumla assumed the reins of government in Bengal in 1660.

During Mir Jumla's viceroyalty there were two occurrences of sufficient importance to deserve notice. These were the re-imposition of imperial authority in Kuch Bihar and the Assam expedition. The Assam expedition was disastrous both from the administrative and military point of view. In the wake of the disaster in the Assam expedition came almost a complete breakdown in the internal administration of Bengal. Mir Jumla's death was followed by the loss of Kuch Bihar to the Mughal empire and a general wave of laxity and disorder in the government of Bengal. Without a supreme master on the spot, the subordinate officers became reckless in their behaviour and oppressive on the subjects. Bengal continued to be governed by subordinate officials like Dilir Khan and Daud Khan till the latter was relieved by Shaista Khan in March 1664.

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 333.



Shaista Khan revived the administration and made the imperial command once more effective in the province. He put his four sons in charge of highest positions in the province next to himself who contributed much to the success of his viceroyalty. Shaista Khan's connection with the imperial family strengthened his position in the subah and he succeeded in enforcing obedience and discipline among the imperial officials in a remarkable degree. He reconquered Kuch Bihar and reduced it once more into a tributary vassal state. He solved some of the administrative problems of which the re-organisation of the Mughal navy deserves special mention. By conquering Sondwip and Chittagong in 1666, Shaista Khan rounded off the Mughal territories in south-eastern Bengal and thereby consolidated imperial authority in that region after a century since Akbar's accession to the imperial throne. Moreover, he ensured the internal security of the province by reducing to submission Bahadur Khan of Hijli, the Raja of Jaintia, the Raja of Tippera and the hill state of Morang.

Imperial authority in Bengal was firmly consolidated and the province enjoyed peace and security during the long tenure of Shaista Khan's viceroyalty (23 years). But before the century ended the decline of the Mughal administration in Bengal had become manifest to all. Ibrahim Khan, who succeeded Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur as viceroy in 1689 was already a weak old man when he came to Bengal. His unmartial character and mild administration encouraged the lawless elements everywhere and ultimately the rising of Shova Singh, a landlord of Cheto-Barda, in the district of Midnapore, broke the peace that Bengal had enjoyed since Shah Jahan's accession.

Shova Singh's rebellion posed a great challenge to the imperial authority and imperial peace in Bengal. Shova Singh started plundering his neighbours about the middle of 1695. Raja Krishnaram, the revenue collector of Burdwan district opposed Shova Singh, but was defeated and killed in January, 1696. The wife and daughters as well as a vast treasure of Raja Krishnaram fell into the hands of the brigand. Almost the entire district of Burdwan passed into the hands of Shova Singh and he assumed the title of Raja and increased his army. Encouraged at such an easy success, Shova Singh now planned to overthrow the imperial government in Bengal. With this object in view, he invited Rahim Khan, the undisputed leader of the Afghans in Orissa, to join him. The success of Shova Singh against Raja Krishnaram inspired the malcontents with great hope

Rebellion of  
Shova Singh

and induced a number of soldiers of fortune and other vagabonds to flock to their standard.

After Krishnaram's death, his son Jagat Ray, having effected his escape to Dacca, laid his complaints before the viceroy. But the latter underestimated the danger and neglected to take necessary steps for restoring order. The viceroy contended himself with ordering Nurullah Khan, the faujdar of Jessore to march against the insurgents.

But the faujdar, who was more interested in his trade than in military operations, half-heartedly marched from Jessore with 3000 horses. But on the approach of the rebels, he lost his courage and shut himself up in the fort of Hughli and implored assistance from the Dutch. The rebels convinced by this pusillanimous conduct of the faujdar advanced boldly and laid siege to the fort of Hughli. The rebels carried on their attack with much vigour. Meanwhile a Dutch contingent arrived on the spot and attacked the town on the landside, while two of their ships bombarded the ramparts from the river.<sup>1</sup> This forced the rebels to retire from Hughli. The rebels, however, retained their hold over the region along the west bank of the Ganges. They became more aggressive and continued daily raids on the neighbouring villages. This caused much consternation among the rich and well-to-do inhabitants. All those on the western bank of the river, who could obtain admittance, took refuge in Chinsura. By constant raids, Shova Singh created a state of his own some 180 miles in length along the bank of the Ganges and he began to collect tolls and customs from the river traffic.

After his expulsion from Hughli in July 1696, Shova Singh came back to Burdwan and sent Rahim Khan to plunder Nadia and Murshidabad. At Burdwan, Shova Singh while making an attempt to dishonour the virgin daughter of Raja Krishnaram, was himself stabbed to death by that heroic girl. Shova Singh was succeeded in his state and power by his brother Himmat Singh who did his utmost in ravaging the well-to-do persons of Burdwan who refused to join the rebels. When the news of the death of Shova Singh reached the rebel army, they unanimously chose Rahim Khan to be their leader. Rahim Khan assumed the title of Rahim Shah. By this time all the country on the western bank of the Ganges from Rajmahal to Midna-

Progress of the rebels

Murder of Rahim Khan—temporary retirement of the rebels

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, pp. 358-361.

pore, was lost to the imperialists and nothing was done till then to check the progress of the rebels. Rahim Khan with an army of 10,000 horses and 60,000 infantry marched upon Murshidabad by way of Nadia and asked the Mughal faujdar of Murshidabad Namat Khan to join his standard. Upon the latter's refusal, Rahim Khan forced his entry into Murshidabad after overwhelming the imperial army. The rebels took and plundered Murshidabad recklessly. By the end of 1696, the rebels occupied Rajmahal and Malda. However, from the middle of 1697 the situation took a better turn for the imperialists. Disgusted by the weakness and negligence of Ibrahim Khan, Aurangzeb dismissed the viceroy and ordered Ibrahim Khan's son Zabardast Khan to proceed against the rebels forthwith. Near Murshidabad, the imperialists wrought havoc upon the rebels and their camp was seized. Within a short time Rahim Khan and Himmat Singh were driven out of Murshidabad and Burdwan. The rebels took refuge in the jungle of Chandrakona. Meanwhile, Zabardast Khan, being disgusted with the cold treatment of the new viceroy Prince Azim-uddin, left the command and retired from the field. The viceroy's inaction and Zabardast Khan's retirement weakened the imperial offensive against the rebels who came out of their jungle refuge and renewed their raids with more vigour. However in August 1698, in a hot engagement the rebel leader Rahim Khan was defeated and slain. On being leaderless, the rebel forces melted away and thus the rebellion started by Shova Singh became quelled.

The rebellion produced serious consequences. With the disappearance of public order, the imperial administration in Bengal almost collapsed. For sometime, the imperial administration was almost wiped out from western Bengal and the lawlessness reigned supreme. The success of the rebels, although temporary, proved beyond doubt that even after a century and a half since the foundation of Mughal rule in Bengal, the imperial administration lacked vigour and efficiency. The rebellion indirectly strengthened the European companies as they were permitted by the provincial government to defend their factories by raising walls and bastions round their factories. The prestige of the European companies rose considerably high in the eyes of the local people as they got a ready asylum in the factories of the foreign companies. "Then was seen a spectacle which no Indian can remember without shame; the sovereign of the country could not protect his subjects and every Indian of wealth and every government

Consequences of  
the rebellion

official of the neighbourhood who could, took refuge in these forts of foreigners to save their lives and honour. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the period from the accession of Akbar to the death of Aurangzeb, the hold of the imperial power in Bengal was not strong nor imperial peace assured. Internal rebellion and external incursions (of the Ahoms, the Maghs and the Feringis) from time to time posed a serious challenge to Mughal authority and peace. Although the Mughals came out successful after every trouble internal and external, the fact remains that the Mughal authority was never highly organised and effective in assuring a perpetual peace and order for any longer period at a stretch. The local chronicles of the 17th century bear ample evidence of serious anomalies of the Mughal administration in Bengal. The zamindars could not be brought under effective control nor the Mughal officials could be effectively put in check. Neither the peasants remained always peaceful. At times, they rose up in arms, expelled the Mughal officials from the districts and brought back their deposed rajas or landlords. Sometimes the peasants found better treatment at the hands of the landlords and made a common cause with them in fighting out the imperial army. The rebellion of the people of Kamrup from time to time and Shova Singh's rebellion bear evidence of this fact. The condition of the imperial army was not at all encouraging. Even after a successful campaign, the soldiers were not sure of their salaries. In times of peace, they could not be expected to remain peaceful with the long arrears of their salaries. In the riverine tract of Bengal, fleet was the only effective instrument of war. But the Mughal government neither took proper care for the up-keep of the fleet nor possessed sufficient number of trained mariners or naval outposts to guard the coastal region against the depredations of the Magh-Feringi pirates. Prince Shuja's negligence and Mir Jumla's Assam campaign utterly ruined the Mughal fleet and Shaista Khan had to create virtually a new flotilla. The Mughal officials were mostly corrupt and oppressive and the governors more concerned with accumulation of wealth. Insubordination and disloyal disposition of the officials often hampered the process of conquest and consolidation. Again, the dualism in the Mughal system of administration was another factor which often hampered the smooth functioning of the government. The subahdar and the diwan were

Weakness of  
Mughal rule  
in Bengal

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 396.

independent of each other and hence jealous of each other. Their mutual quarrel and antagonism sometimes brought the administration on the verge of collapse.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE MUGHAL ADMINISTRATION IN BENGAL, 1556-1707

**Growth and development of the administration.** Imperial administration was not set up in a day in Bengal. The Mughals took many years to institute a settled and peaceful government in the province. Though Bengal had been included among the eleven subahs to which Akbar sent out orders in November 1586 for setting up his new type of uniform provincial administration, the order took a quarter of a century to be actually implemented.

When Daud Karrani surrendered himself to the imperial commander Munim Khan after the battle of Tukaroi in 1575 in the darbar tent at Cuttack, the ceremony merely proclaimed the *de jure* annexation of Bengal to Akbar's empire. Before the battle of Tukaroi, the imperialists after overwhelming Daud and his Afghan army at Rajmahal in September 1574, entered Tanda the capital of Bengal. That was the maiden entry of the Mughals in the capital of Bengal. But that did not mean that imperial rule began in Bengal forthwith. Munim Khan was appointed Mughal governor of Bengal who only could consolidate the imperial position in the capital city and nothing more. Several factors stood in the way of introducing something like a regular civil government. With the fall of Daud Karrani the central government of Bengal also fell to pieces and disruptive forces raised their heads all throughout the province which took a long time to be thoroughly conquered by the imperial power. Even after Daud's surrender to Munim Khan, introduction of a regular imperial administration and imposition of imperial peace in Bengal was still far off. Bengal lost its political as well as administrative cohesion and for many years the province suffered from confusion and anarchy. It should not be supposed that Bihar and Western Bengal as a whole came under Mughal domination immediately with the fall of Daud. In fact, a few towns in Bihar and fewer still in Bengal came under the possession of the Mughal military officers and even in them the Mughal authority was not properly enforced. Disruptive elements were

rampant everywhere which made the prospect of a regular government well nigh impossible and which sometimes threatened the very existence of the loosely established imperial authority. Throughout the period between 1575 and 1604, the temporary expansion and retreat of the imperial power made it extremely difficult to organise a regular and peaceful government in the province. Akbar's time and the first eight years after Jahangir's accession, were the age of conquering generals who were more interested in expanding Mughal sway over Bengal than in consolidating the imperial power in the conquered regions. The Mughal generals and governors of Akbar's time contended themselves with merely securing nominal submission of the Hindu landlords of Bengal, and independent Afghan jagirdars of the previous epoch and did not seriously make any effort to bring them under direct imperial control. There is no denying the fact that "under Akbar, Mughal rule in Bengal was more like an armed occupation than a settled administration". And this is evident from the extent of the imperial rule and its nature in Bengal where the effective control of the imperial government was confined to a very narrow limit not extending far beyond the capital city of Rajmahal and the few fortified posts. In fact, during Akbar's reign, local opposition to the progress of the imperial arms mainly by the Afghan veterans of Daud Khan was so stiff and so frequently surprising that the imperialists could not think of introducing regular administration. It was only in the reign of Jahangir that effective steps were taken to work out the administrative details and to impose a uniform administrative system over the whole province. Of course, it took the imperialists many years to evolve a regular civil government.

After the fall of the Karrani dynasty, Munim Khan, the imperial commander, was appointed the first Mughal viceroy of Bengal in addition to his military duties. To assist Munim Khan in the task of consolidating imperial hold over the occupied region, Raja Todar Mal was appointed in addition to the military duties of the latter. Todar Mal helped Munim Khan in pacifying the inhabitants of the Bengal capital Tanda as well as in arranging financial matters. The governorship was military in character called 'Sipahasalar' or 'Sirlashkar' or 'Hakim' directly appointed by the emperor Akbar. It is obvious that under Akbar, Bengal was under a sort of military government presided over by military governors. Although the Mughal rule in

The beginning  
of imperial  
administration

Bengal assumed civil character during Jahangir's reign, the civil system of government must have been matured towards the close of Akbar's reign. Bihar was made a separate administrative unit under a Subahdar or Sipahasalar. The years following the overthrow of Daud Karrani were the years of stresses and strains and anxieties for the imperialists in Bengal. How unstable and weak the Mughal government was is evident in the abandonment of the province by the Mughal soldiers and generals en block following the death of Munim Khan. On the death of Munim Khan, the emperor conferred the vacant viceroyalty of the province upon Husain Quli Khan with the title Khan-i-Jahan. To assist the viceroy, Raja Todar Mal was appointed his lieutenant. The Raja's duties were not specified. A few development arose in the imperial service in Bengal. As Khan-i-Jahan was a Shia, the imperial officers in Bengal, being mostly Sunnis and Turks, refused to take their orders from the viceroy. It was enormous gifts and presents from the imperial treasury, that at last quietened the imperial officers. Uptil then, there was no such officer in the rank of a treasurer. Presumably, the money-transactions were directly dealt with by the viceroy himself and his trusted adherents. After the reconquest of Bengal by Khan-i-Jahan by 1578, the emperor despatched to Bengal a large number of young officers "to manage the finances of the province under occupation". How deep-seated corruption was prevalent among the older section of the imperial officers in Bengal at the initial state of occupation is evident in the mutual fights and antagonism between the older and newer sections of the imperial officers. The easy acquisition of wealth so much corrupted the older section of the officials that they tried their best to frustrate the financial arrangements attempted by the new officials. The viceroy Khan-i-Jahan seems to have adopted an attitude of non-interference in this matter as his interference might have aggravated the situation because of his particular religious faith. Moreover, the viceroy at this stage does not appear to have been given any precise authority to deal with the financial matters. He was mainly concerned with military affairs.

Officers from  
Delhi

Antagonism be-  
tween older and  
younger sections  
of officers

By this time emperor Akbar clearly perceived that the age of conquest was over and that the more beneficent and enduring work of administration should begin. With this object in view, he decided to divide his empire into a number of provinces



called 'Subahs' and to introduce a uniform system of government in each Subah. Hence along with the new viceroy for Bengal Muzaffar Khan, he sent from the imperial capital a staff of departmental heads, viz. 'diwan', 'bakhshi', 'mir-adl', 'sadr', 'kotwal', 'mir-bahar', and 'waqa-navis'. These officials were entrusted with the duty of building up a new administration as well as establishing "official routine in the place of the arbitrary personal rule which necessarily marks every period of conquest and martial law".<sup>1</sup> They were specifically instructed to settle the revenue matters by applying Todar Mal's Zabti system as was adopted in Upper India, to resume unauthorised alienations of land and to put an end to the usual military fraud of false musters by introducing the system of branding of the horses in every military officer's contingent. This appears to be the maiden attempt on the part of the Mughal emperor to organise a regular administration in Bengal by appointing a number of high ranking officials in charge of varied duties. Departmental system of administration, thus, seems to have started in the province. Again, the emperor's hold over the provincial administration seems to have been firm as it was he who appointed not only the provincial governor but also the other graded officials next in rank to the Sipahasalar or Subahdar. It was the emperor who only could dismiss, transfer and punish otherwise any officer on ground of inefficiency, corruption and disloyalty. Even the emperor had absolute hold over the posting of troops and appointment of subordinate commanders. It was during Akbar's reign that Bihar was separated from Bengal under a governor appointed by the emperor. Yet Akbar's administrative experiments were rudimentary in character and it took the imperialists a long time to establish an elaborate civil administration in the province. However, in 1586, Akbar made another attempt to strengthen the civil administration of the province. By a royal decree the emperor ordered for each province including Bengal the same uniform cadre of official heads, viz. a governor, a deputy-governor, a revenue minister (diwan), a criminal judge (Qazi) and a police prefect (Kotwal). It was during the leave-vacancy of Raja Man Singh from Bengal that the Raja's grand-son Maha Singh was sent to Bengal to serve as deputy governor.

Initiation of  
Subah system of  
government

Departmental  
heads appointed

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<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 196.

Jagir system was introduced in Bengal from the very beginning of the Mughal conquests. Munim Khan, the first Mughal governor of Bengal, after occupying the capital city of Tanda, detached Majnum Khan to take possession of Ghoraghat on the right bank of the Karatoya river. The Mughal commander having performed the services, divided the entire region in possession of the Afghans amongst his own followers on condition of protecting the region against the Afghans as well as assisting the imperialists with contingents whenever required. This system of military service was perfectly congenial to the imperial government of Bengal which was essentially military in character in the beginning. "Every chief", writes Stewart, "in succession established himself and his dependents in the district to which he had been first appointed; and the late governor Khan Jahan, being only solicitous about extirpating the Afghans, allowed them to continue in undisturbed possession. But when the new system of finance was introduced by the emperor Akbar, the governor was directed to call upon these officers for the muster-returns of their brigades and to demand from them balance of revenue exceeding the amount required for the regular payment of the Army. He was further ordered to change the jagirs to prevent the troops establishing themselves in any one place."<sup>1</sup> In the initial state of conquests, the independent Afghan chiefs and rebel landlords were allowed to retain their respective estates as their personal jagir. But with the gradual expansion of the conquests and consolidation of the imperial power, the imperial government in Bengal began to assume a stern attitude to these holders of jagirs. With a view to prevent any combination amongst the jagirdars against the imperial authority, some of them were deprived of their holdings altogether and the jagirs of others were distributed in several parganas so that it might be extremely difficult for them to unite their forces at any time against the imperial power. In pursuance of the royal order, Khalady Khan, jagirdar of Ballasore and Baba Khan, jagirdar of Ghoraghat were deprived of their fiefs. These chiefs remonstrated very strongly against the orders and rose in rebellion and a large number of their adherents flocked to their standard. The emperor, having been informed of the mutiny and apprehensive lest it might become general throughout the army, sent an order to the governor reprimanding him for the harshness of his conduct, "penegy-

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 193.

rising the former fidelity and attachment of the tribe of Kakeshalan and assuring the mutineers of the imperial forgiveness if they would return to their allegiance and duty".<sup>1</sup> However, the rebels were disarmed shortly. Acting on the advice of the emperor, Raja Man Singh cancelled the jagirs of the Afghan chiefs of Orissa and assigned them fresh jagirs in the Faridpur district of East Bengal. But shortly, realising that it would be unwise to plant the Afghan chiefs so close to the border of Orissa where they had many followers and a long local connection, Man Singh cancelled their jagirs. It was during this time that two high salaried revenue officers, viz. Pay-master General and Superintendent of Revenue were appointed in Bengal. At the same time that the alteration had taken place in the financial system of Bengal, a separate pay master-general and superintendent of revenue had been appointed to the province of Bihar. And these officers, having also endeavoured to carry into execution the orders of the imperial court relating to jagir, antagonised the military commanders very much and consequently, the troops in Bihar also rose in arms. The practice of assigning jagirs to the military officers in Bengal was in vogue since the establishment of Mughal authority in Bengal. Such was the extent of jagirs in the possession of the imperial officials that the crown-land was almost negligible and as such the government derived practically no income from the crown-land. Besides the imperial officials, petty landlords after their submission to the Mughal emperor, were assigned jagirs. Even the estates of some of the prominent 'bhuiyas' after their submission, were assigned to them as jagir. Hence the extent of the areas covered by the jagirs was not at all negligible. Moreover, there were many virtuous freeholders (aimadars) and stipened-holders who created a serious problem in the province.

'Mansabs' were generally conferred on high ranking military officials. The leading 'mansabdars' were either provincial governors or generals in the army. Whenever they were sent to Bengal, 'mansabs' were conferred on them. This was of course a general practice. While the earlier governors of Bengal since the conquest of Bengal in 1575, were not particularly honoured with any 'mansab', the later governors and military officials were generally honoured with the

'Mansab' conferred on high officials

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 193.

same and high title. Raja Man Singh was raised to the rank of 7,000, "a dignity which before that time, had not been conferred on any subject" at least in Bengal. Upon Jahangir's accession, Raja Man Singh was again appointed governor of Bengal. The emperor, bestowing rich khilat, appointed the Raja with a higher 'mansab'. The next governor Qutbuddin Kokah, while appointed governor of Bengal, was "raised to the rank of a 'panjhazari' with 5,000 soldiers and troopers and two lakhs of rupees was granted to him for his allowance and three lakhs of rupees for the expenses of his contingent".<sup>1</sup> Islam Khan was raised to the rank of a 'panjhazari' including soldiers and troopers. In recognition of the meritorious services rendered by Islam Khan against Khwaja Usman, the emperor raised the governor to the mansab of a 'shashazari'. Even the imperial commanders who contributed to the success of the imperialists against Usman, were raised to higher mansabs. Mir Jumla was appointed as governor of Bengal in the mansab of 7,000. So it is evident that granting of 'mansab' to the high ranking officials was in vogue in Bengal as in other subahs of the empire.

Since the time of Akbar, the hold of the emperor over the provincial rulers was almost absolute. The higher officials serving in the province were directly appointed by the emperor and they could only be transferred, dismissed or punished otherwise by the emperor alone. Emperor Akbar instituted the practice of issuing a Procedure Code from time to time to be strictly observed by the subahdar and the diwan in the administration of the affairs of the state and "they were not permitted to deviate from or infringe them by a hair-breadth".<sup>2</sup> The Procedure Code or Manual, containing a set of rules and regulations on all revenue and administrative affairs was called in Persian *Dastur-ul-Amal*. "It was issued to all Provincial Governors, Administrators and officials after being personally approved by the Emperor himself and every year modifications or additions were made to it with the Emperor's approval".<sup>3</sup> Jahangir and Aurangzeb used to issue from time to time farmans containing certain rules and regulations to be observed by the provincial administrations. Jahangir's farman to Islam Khan in Bengal containing a set of rules bears an ample illustration. Whenever, the governor was appointed, the emperor used to

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<sup>1</sup> *Riyaz*, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, (Foot-note).

administer certain advices to the former in connection with the administration of the province. Akbar's advices to Muzaffar Khan, Raja Todar Mal and Raja Man Singh, Jahangir's advices to Islam Khan, Ibrahim Khan, Shah Jahan's advices to Qasim Khan and Aurangzeb's advices to Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan may be cited in this context.

It was in the reign of Akbar that rules were laid down for the succession to the Subahdari of Bengal. If the subahdar of Bengal died or transferred, the highest officer at Monghyr was to take charge; if there was no such officer then the subahdar of Bihar was to take over the administrative charge of Bengal. This practice continued almost uninterrupted till the close of Aurangzeb's reign.

It was only in the reign of Jahangir that Mughal administration really started in Bengal with a large number of civil and military officials and their duties and responsibilities well defined. Upon his arrival in Bengal as the subahdar, Islam Khan sent a report to the imperial court wherein he made the following suggestions for the emperor's consideration: "The management of the affairs of the province", he wrote, "should receive the attention of the officers of the state. The office of the Diwan should be given to a man of integrity. Ihtimam Khan who is one of the most efficient officers of the imperial court, or some one else as competent, should be sent as the chief officer of the fleet and the artillery. All the old officers who proved to be dishonest and treacherous and who are unfit for service in this province should be recalled to the court."<sup>1</sup> The emperor seems to have given a freehand to Islam Khan in the matter of selection of officers as the imperial farman issued in the light of the viceroy's suggestions ran thus: "Any of these old officers who takes recourse to his old habits and courses of action against your orders and advice, should be discharged from service. Whoever is wanted by you from the court, we shall appoint him in that place."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Islam Khan sent away all the incompetent and dishonest officers and the Afghan chiefs of doubtful loyalty to the court. For the first time a department of admiralty was organised with a number of imperial boats under a new admiral (Mirbahar) Ihtimam Khan, who was also put in the

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

rank of 1,000 Zat (personal) and 700 horse. With a view to strengthen the civil government in Bengal, the emperor sent to Islam Khan all the nobles who were in Allahabad, Jaunpur and Bihar with horses and robes according to their rank and dignity. Abul Hasan with the title of Mufaqid Khan was appointed to the post of the diwan. A number of subordinate qazis were appointed in the district headquarters on the recommendation of the Chief Provincial Qazi. From these new appointments, it appears that the emperor was determined to reorganise the provincial administration on a sound basis. In fact, since Jahangir's accession, the Bengal administration began to assume more and more civil character.

As has been told earlier that each imperial commander whether land or naval, was assigned jagir for the maintenance of the troops, under his command. Ihtimam Khan, while proceeding from Rehtas towards Bengal, sent his personal attendant Muhammad Murad ahead of him to the Bengal viceroy Islam Khan so that in accordance with the royal orders he might arrange the salaries of the army from the income of jagirs and prepare the muster-roll of the assignment of jagirs from Islam Khan and Mutaquid Khan and depute revenue collectors to different places. Upon the order of the viceroy, the diwan assigned a number of parganas in lieu of the salaries of Ihtimam Khan's troops as well as some 'mahals' to Ihtimam Khan as his personal jagir. From the foregoing arrangement it appears that the subahdar possessed no authority over the personal jagir of the imperial officer nor even over the jagir assigned for the maintenance of the troops under him. This practice continued till Murshid Kuli Khan made a sweeping change in the revenue system of Bengal when most of the jagirs of the imperial officers and mansabdars were turned into khalsa direct under the Crown Collectors and the dispossessed officers were assigned jagirs in the poor, wild and unsubdued province of Orissa. It is to be noted that the viceroy had no authority over the revenue collectors appointed by the imperial generals and officers in their respective jagirs. And this dual authority over the subject people often led to troubles among the imperial officials themselves.

After each conquest, the conquered region was brought under direct control of the provincial government. New recruits of different cadre were instantly made like faujdar, 'sardar', 'amil' and other revenue collectors. Usually the diwan was entrusted with the task of assessing the revenue of the conquered domain with the help of the imperial commander and the rent-roll was brought to the government

record-office at Dacca, after it was signed by the 'chowdhuries' and 'qanungos'. It was then handed over to the accountants in order to enforce these regulations on the ryots and jagirdars. After the assessment work was completed, the faujdar and somewhere "sardar" was to take charge of the conquered tract from the imperial commander. The imperial officers were assigned jagirs in the conquered tract for their maintenance.

It was during the reign of Jahangir that the law of escheat was vigorously applied to the property of the deceased imperial mansabdars in Bengal as in other parts of the empire. The Rule of escheat procedure followed was that on the death of the mansabdar, the provincial diwan deputed some accountants to assess the property of the deceased and after it was done, the agents of the subahdar, the diwan and the bakshi used to receive the articles in presence of the Qazi and the superintendent of the court of justice (Mir-i-Adl). The necessary formalities were performed in the court of law. It was the duty of the 'mustawfi', to sign and seal the transactions of sales and the cheques of soldiers and servants at the time of the death of the mansabdar. This custom prevailed throughout the Mughal period.<sup>1</sup>

The Mughal emperors were much interested in upholding their supreme authority over the provincial governments. Whenever the subahdar behaved or acted contrary to the desires of the sovereign, he was censured very strongly. Till the first few years of Jahangir's reign, the code of conduct for the subahdar of Bengal was not precisely settled. The repeated reports of Islam Khan's autocratic and arrogant conduct, particularly towards the officers sent from court, his partiality for his own men as well as his assumption of royal prerogatives invited the emperor's intervention directly for the first time in the activities of the subahdar. By issuing a seventeen-point farman, Jahangir tried to rectify the abuses and to precisely fix up the duties and responsibilities of the subahdar. Although the farman was issued for the guidance of the subahdars in general, almost every clause appears to have been directed at Islam Khan who was guilty of breaches of the rules framed so far. As for instance, dwelling on the assumption of royal prerogatives by Islam Khan, Mirza Nathan writes : "He (Islam Khan) prepared a high platform (for holding a military review), higher

Jahangir's 17-point farman

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 210.

than the height of two men and constructed a small house on it. It was named 'jharuka'. The great officers, who could not attend to pay respects as the 'chawki' were ordered to depute one of their sons or near relations in their place and they were ordered to pass their time during nights at the royal guard-house. The other officers were directed to make their obeisance, standing at the qur (standard). . . . Mirza Syafuddin. . . who was ordered to make obeisance standing at the 'qur' and to pay imperial respects by turning his face towards the west, refused to do so. Then. . . the Bakshi of Islam Khan imprisoned him. For this reason the wise ones of the age spent their time without uttering a word about this matter."<sup>1</sup> Hence an ordinance containing seventeen-points of admonition was issued to the subahdars and particularly to Islam Khan to be observed without the slightest deviation from them. The ordinance ran thus : <sup>2</sup>

1. "No imperial officer should deviate from the right principle in his food and drink and in giving the people their rightful due. As whatever remains after them ceases to belong them, why should they carry on their shoulders the burden of denying the people their lawful rights and thus make their burden (of sin) heavier on the Day of Judgment ?"
2. "They should not hold any imperial review. They must live according to their own status."
3. "No subahdar should sit on a place higher than half a human height above the ground."
4. "No man, beginning from the nobles down to the lowest imperial servant, is to be compelled to salute and make obeisance."
5. "The imperial officers must not be made to remain standing on foot."
6. "No man should be flayed alive for any offence."
7. "The eyes of a man are to be pulled out under no circumstance whatever."
8. "The subahdars must not set up their standards and compel officers to bow down to them."
9. "They must not beat kettle-drums at the time of setting out on a journey."

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*



10. "They must not play the kettle-drums before them after the manner of the Emperor when they go out riding."
11. "For the welfare of the Emperor, they must act equitably with their friends and foes. Personal grudge must not come in."
12. "The services rendered by devoted officers must not be suppressed. These must be faithfully reported to the Emperor."
13. "They must not engage in any undertaking with permission."
14. "When a horse is presented to any officer, he should not be made to make obeisance (to the subahdar) by placing the rein on his neck."
15. "The great imperial officers must not be compelled to follow the officers of their own (i.e. of the Subahdars)."
16. "If it is desired to report on the merits of officers, they should send the imperial officers by one direction and their own warriors by another (to serve in expeditions)" and
17. "They must take pains to see that all the officers appointed in their respective subahs work honestly and faithfully and discharge their duties strictly in accordance with the imperial regulations."

The ordinance quoted above went a long way in fixing precisely the duties and responsibilities of the imperial officers serving in a province and thereby removing, to a great extent, the prevailing anomalies in the provincial service. Hence, the importance of this 17-point ordinance cannot be minimised in the context of the Mughal administration in Bengal.

But in spite of the 17-point ordinance, lack of discipline and order continued in the rank of the imperial officers including the viceroy. Due to his failure to comply in toto with the imperial orders, Islam Khan's mansab was first reduced by 2,000 personnel and horse and then he was suspended for some time. The next governor Qasim Khan was more autocratic, arrogant and violent in temper than his brother Islam Khan. As a result the administration of the province suffered much. Upon the frequent reports of the diwan and bakshi of the province regarding the improper behaviour of Qasim Khan with the imperial officers, the emperor sent Ibrahim Kalal, superintendent of the court of justice to Bengal in order to give verbal admonitions to Qasim Khan along with the diwan, the Bakshi and

the news-writer. In the presence of the subahdar, the diwan, the bakhshi, the waqa-navis and the nobles, Ibrahim Kalal delivered the imperial verbal message,<sup>1</sup> first to Qasim Khan thus : “. . .He (Qasim Khan) himself knows what the Subah of Bengal is like, and what type of imperial officers were Khan-i-Jahan, Ismail Quli Khan. . .Raja Man Singh . . .and lately Islam Khan, who held the subahdarship and kept the whole country free from the mischief mongers. He (Islam Khan) behaved so agreeably with the loyal officers of this court that upto the time of his death, he had not displeased any of them, small or great. . . .He (Qasim Khan) ought to behave with all the officers of the sky-resembling court according to their status in a friendly way and agreeable manner. He should not disturb the administration of the imperial affairs to suit his own purpose . . . .He should adopt praiseworthy manners and should remove the spirit of dissension and rivalry which are appearing among the loyal officers. . . .” To the diwan, the imperial message was thus : “He (the diwan) ought to behave with the governor of the province and the other officers in such a way that they might take complete account from him . . . . Qasim Khan should have a strong hand over the affairs with which he is entrusted. It is also obligatory on him (the diwan) not to depart from the rules of decorum and the approval of Qasim Khan in those affairs which are meant for the welfare of the Emperor. He ought to be very enthusiastic in his own duties.” Then turning to the bakhshi, the imperial envoy delivered the message thus, “. . .on two or three occasions, during the rule of Islam Khan, many faults were committed by him (the bakhshi-Tahir Mahammad) . . . we pardoned him so that he might not commit any more fault and might pay real attention to imperial duties. Now he had again committed a crime by concealing such an affair regarding the controversial words and deeds of Qasim Khan and the oppression he perpetrated on the great Diwan. He did not report this matter . . . .He must not depart from seeking the approval of Qasim Khan which is equal to the approval of His Majesty . . . .” The imperial message to the news-writer was thus : “. . . we have appointed him to the post of the news-writer of Bengal on belief that he is an experienced and trustworthy slave . . . . He ought to be very warm in his duties and should be confident of imperial favours. . . .”

It appears from the foregoing passage that mutual animosity among

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

the imperial officers in Bengal and the viceroys' constant endeavours to rule autocratically with the help of a small 'coterie' of subordinates not only hampered the imperial interests but also gave rise to much confusion and disorder in the provincial administration. Through repeated regulations and ordinances, Jahangir tried to enforce rigid discipline in the rank of the officers so that the provincial administration might develop smoothly.

In spite of the emperor's repeated admonitions, Qasim Khan's arrogance and his ill-treatment towards the imperial officers continued unabated. His efforts to undermine the position and rank of the diwan, and the bakhshi compelled the emperor at last to make a new experiment in the administrative set-up. He decided that "for the posts of the diwan, the Bakhshi and the waqa-navis of Bengal such a type of man of high rank should be sent and appointed from the court who was of equal rank with Qasim Khan and who would be able to meet the whimsical Khan and overpower him in questions and replies".<sup>1</sup> With this object in view, Mukhlis Khan was appointed to the combined office of the diwan, bakhshi and waqa-navis with the following instructions: "In all affairs . . . you should act as a check to Qasim Khan. . . . If you find that he is unfit for the subahdarship. . . . then send a representation. . . . Act in such a manner that you may bring about reforms in all the affairs."<sup>2</sup> Of course, this experiment was shortly abandoned and the old practice restored. But it shows the emperor's eagerness and anxiety in putting the provincial viceroy to proper check.

It was in the reign of Jahangir that the custom of remitting annual revenue in cash from the provincial exchequer was made obligatory on the subahdar. For a number of years, except the twenty-two lakhs of rupees remitted by Khanahzad Khan (1625-26), no revenue had ever been sent from Bengal in cash. A few months before his death, Jahangir stipulated with the new governor Fidai Khan (March 1627) that in addition to the usual presents of elephants, silks, muslins, amber, etc. he should annually "remit from Bengal in the shape of presents, a sum of five lakhs for the Emperor and an equal amount for the Queen-consort Nurjahan". From this time, the personal tributes of the governors of Bengal were fixed at that

Remittance of annual tribute to the imperial Court

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

sum, i.e. ten lakhs of rupees. This personal tribute from Bengal governors almost came to an end in the reign of Shah Jahan. Only Qasim Khan remitted presents to the emperor in January 1632 worth two lakhs of rupees, consisting of 33 elephants, 27-hill ponies, 40 maunds of aloe wood and the other products of the province. "Under a rule made in Jahangir's last years, every new subahdar of Bengal was bound to send to the emperor cash and presents worth five lakhs of rupees once in his viceroyalty as his tribute. This amount was expected to be made up of the tribute payable by the local vassals and landholders to the new viceroy in honour of his arrival. Thus every three years—the average duration of a subahdar in Bengal—the screw was turned at the top and the leading men of the province were squeezed for satisfying the throne."<sup>1</sup> In 1682 Shaista Khan promised to remit five lakhs annually as the tribute of Bengal so long as the emperor was out on his campaigns in the Deccan. This annual remittance continued till 1685 and possibly later.

The Mughal administration that took shape in the reign of Jahangir, continued till the close of Aurangzeb's reign without any major change. And before the century (17th) ended, the decline of the Mughal government in Bengal as elsewhere had become manifest to all.

**The pattern of Mughal rule in Bengal.** The pattern of the imperial rule in Bengal during the period under review was of a varied character. Its key note was, of course, centralisation of the administration. In this respect, the Mughal rule in Bengal was different from that of the Turko-Afghan age when the Bengal administration was largely feudal in character. Although attempts at centralisation were made during the Husain Shahi regime, some amount of feudal autonomy within a loose central frame-work continued till the downfall of the Karrani dynasty. Doubtless, the feudal autocrats mostly Muslims gave much trouble to the Mughals in the earlier stage of their conquests in Bengal. The Bengal zamindars, Hindus and Muslims who usurped independent and semi-independent position during the declining days of the Turko-Afghan rule, delayed, in fact, the process of the consolidation and centralisation in Bengal for many years. A uniform administration as instituted in other parts of the Mughal empire was not possible

Distinctive  
features

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 329.

in Bengal, because Bengal's political and administrative traditions were different from that of the other subahs of the empire.

The administrative structure of Bengal during the period under review had three distinct features. Firstly, the central government of Delhi had absolute control over the provincial administration and throughout the period the imperial court zealously maintained its hold over the provincial government. Secondly, parts of the province over which the provincial government had direct control and authority were administered almost in the same way as is to be found in the other provinces of the empire. Bengal under the direct administrative control of the provincial government was a replica of the imperial court of Delhi in grandeur and magnificence. Thirdly, large parts of Bengal were under the local landlords who were allowed to enjoy some sort of semi-independent position under the political supremacy of the Mughal government. For the sake of political expediency, the imperialists instead of thoroughly absorbing the domain of these landlords, rather allowed them to enjoy some amount of autonomy within the imperial frame-work. During Jahangir's reign, the zamindars, big and small, were played off one against the others with promises of imperial favour and reward, sometimes in the form of territories with a view to preventing a unified and concerted resistance to the imperial arms.<sup>1</sup> Hence the landlords who submitted voluntarily to the imperial government or those who rendered services to the imperial government were allowed some degree of local autonomy.

**Emperor's hold over the provincial government.** So far as Bengal was concerned, the emperor's hold over the provincial administration was absolute from the very beginning of the Mughal conquest to the end of the period. Of course, during Akbar's reign, the central control over the provincial administration was subject to certain limitations. Due to the difficulty of the communications between Delhi and Bengal as they lay through the territories of hostile powers as well as the centre's lack of correct knowledge of Bengal situation, the conquering generals of Akbar's time from Munim Khan to Raja Man Singh, were allowed some amount of local initiative. And it was very natural at the time of the imperial conquest of a country when the people on the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

spot had to face the hazards of the situation. In the beginning of the expansion of the imperial arms in Bengal, the governor was empowered to recruit troops locally, to plan out the campaigns and to fix up the terms of peace with the vanquished enemies as well as with those who voluntarily rendered submission. But at the same time the emperor continued to exert his control over the imperialists in Bengal in various ways. It was the emperor alone who appointed one as governor in whom he had absolute confidence. The subordinate generals were also appointed by him sometimes in consultation with the governor. By continually sending recruits and officers from the imperial court, the emperor tried to exert his authority over the provincial government. Although Akbar allowed the provincial governors some degree of initiative in the matter of administration and conquests, the latter had to seek the former's approval on important matters. The imperial officers serving in the province including the governor, were subject to transfer, re-call or dismissal by the emperor alone. With the gradual consolidation of the imperial power, the emperor's hold over the provincial government also became more and more strong and effective. A number of officers were created for the purpose of check and balance and a series of administrative measures were taken to exert the emperor's manifold control over the local authorities as well as to keep the central government informed of the happenings in the province. For the purpose of smooth functioning of the provincial administration as well as strengthening the central control, rules were laid down for the succession to the subahdarship of Bengal. If the subahdar of Bengal died or dismissed, the highest imperial officer at Monghyr was to take its charge ; if there was no such officer, then the governor of Bihar was to take charge. The 'mansab', salary and jagir of the imperial officers including those of the governor were fixed by the emperor. Again it was the emperor alone who could reduce the mansab or jagir of the imperial officers in the province. The appointment of a staff of departmental heads like the Diwan, Bakhshi, Mid Adl, Sadr, Kotwal, Mir Bahar and Waqa-navis by Akbar bear ample testimony to the desire and anxiety of the emperor to establish official routine in the place of the arbitrary personal rule of the governor.<sup>1</sup> These imperial officers as distinct from the provincial officers of minor cadre, preserved the interests of the emperor by exercising checks and balances on the whims and caprices of the provincial subahadar. During the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

reign of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the appointment of the imperial princes and others related to the imperial household strengthened the emperor's hold over the provincial administration. Evidences of the emperor's hold over the provincial administration are to be found in the dismissal of the governors and other imperial officers in the province on several occasions. The emperor's hold was further tightened by making it obligatory on the part of the governors to remit peshkash or tribute regularly to the imperial court. And this defined in clear terms Bengal's relationship with the centre. At the early stage of the Mughal administration, when the income from the provincial exchequer was uncertain, the tribute was usually paid both in cash and kind. Generally, elephants and products of the province were sent to the court as the governor's tribute. During Islam Khan's viceroyalty, eunuchs were sent to Delhi as imperial tribute. During Qasim Khan's viceroyalty, "the revenues of the Crown-lands as shown in the register of cash-realisation ('tumar') had to be remitted to the court". Although no revenue had been so far remitted from Bengal by the predecessors of Muzaffar Khan (1579-80) "under the pretence that the great military establishment had absorbed the whole, Muzaffar Khan, in the first year, sent to court five lakhs of rupees in specie, a number of elephants and a large collection of the valuable manufactures and natural productions of that country".<sup>1</sup> Qasim Khan (1614-17) was forced to send two lakhs in cash besides a bond for the balance due which he promised to send through provincial couriers. In 1627, Fidai Khan stipulated to remit annually from Bengal in the shape of presents, a sum of rupees five lakhs for the emperor and an equal amount for the queen-consort. From this time, the personal tribute of the Bengal governors were fixed at that sum. Besides the usual tributes, the booty sent by the campaigning generals were required to be sent to the imperial court. This financial obligations of the provincial governors prove the strength of the central control.

Sometimes, the emperor interfered in the viceroy's activities more directly. In matters of great importance the governor was to seek the emperor's advice and direction. The prerogative which the only emperor enjoyed in issuing ordinance or decree upon the subahdar was a strong weapon in the former's hand. If the subahdar showed any sort of disloyalty or an unduly independent spirit, strongly worded royal decree or farman came from the imperial court to bring the

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 193.

subahdar to book. These royal farmans were otherwise detailed regulations for the provincial administration. The best illustration which can be cited in this connection was the imperial farman issued by Jahangir during Islam Khan's tenure of office in Bengal. Although the farman was issued for the guidance of the subahdars and other officers in Bengal in general, almost every clause appears to have been aimed at Islam Khan "who was more than any one of his colleagues guilty of breaches of the rules framed". Islam Khan was temporarily discharged for not acting in conformity with the said farman although he was reinstated shortly. The emperor used to take special interest in preserving the dignity and power of the high-ranking imperial officers like the diwan, the bakhshi, the mir-adl, the sadar, etc. in order to ensure the emperor's hold over the subahdar and the provincial government. These imperial officers exercised a serious check on the subahdar. From time to time, the emperor used to send his personal envoys to bestow rewards and administer admonition. Khilats, robes of honour, horses and other valuables used to come regularly from the imperial court as a mark of his approval of the officers' good services. The royal envoy carrying the imperial message or farman was received by the subahdar and other imperial officers with all humility and respect. The general practice of receiving the royal farman was that upon the appraisal of the arrival of the royal envoy with the farman, the subahdar along with other high-ranking officers used to go on foot a long distance. After performing the necessary rites of obeisance, he received the farman with his hands in respect and placed it on his head and eyes. After that the subahdar returned to his palace with the imperial envoy and observed the formalities of customary hospitality and the rules of reverence.<sup>1</sup> As has been related earlier that Ibrahim Kalal was sent from the imperial court not only to warn the subahdar but also to strongly admonish the bakhshi, the diwan and the waqa-navis as well. Any disrespect to the imperial order was sternly dealt with. Reduction of mansabs seems to have been the usual form of punishment. Recalcitrant officers were sometimes transferred as a way of punishment. The fear of imperial investigation acted as a constant check on the officers. On the report of Qasim Khan's conflict with the diwan, an imperial officer was sent from the court to investigate the matter and the subahdar was ordered to redress the grievances of punishment. It was on the report of the waqa-navis

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<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 294.



as well on the basis of the informations sent by the spies that a powerful governor and a person related to the imperial household like Shaista Khan was recalled to the court for the alleged accumulation of wealth by him and his oppression on the peasants. However, as the allegation proved to be baseless, he was reinstated subsequently. From time to time, imperial messengers were sent from the court to visit the distant imperial outposts, distributing presents and inspecting the defence and thus maintaining a direct link between the imperial capital and the distant parts of Bengal. The Mughal law of escheat whereby the property of the deceased officer was forfeited to the imperial treasury, was a further bond between the emperor and his officers. "...the emperor was the highest master; the pir, and the qibla and his sublime court, the ultimate resort in matters spiritual as well as temporal."<sup>1</sup>

The central government or the emperor had little contact with the subject people of Bengal, although from time to time the emperor's messengers were sent to collect informations about the subjects, their grievances if any as well as the treatment of the officials towards them. The custom of sending the rebel chiefs or landlords to the imperial court, the bestowal of rewards and mansabs on the local landlords for their good services to the Crown—all these established some sort of a loose contact between the imperial court and the people of Bengal.<sup>2</sup> Shah Jahan was very particular in establishing some sort of a direct contact with the people of Bengal as he advised prince Shuja thus: "As you prefer to live at Rajmahal, you ought to make an official tour of your province by proceeding from Rajmahal to Burdwan and thence to Medinipur. This last-named city is on the frontier of Orissa; you ought to call up there such of your officers from Orissa as you like and receive their accounts and reports about the country. From Medinipur, you should go to Jahanabad (Arambagh) and thence to Satgaon, Hughli and Mukhsadabad and finally return to Rajmahal. This enables you to learn the condition of the country and the people."<sup>3</sup>

**The administrative structure.** The Mughal administrative structure in Bengal was mostly similar to that in other subahs of the empire. Although as early as 1586 Akbar by a royal decree ordered for each province of his empire the same type of regular

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 334.

administration under the same necessary cadre of officers with division of functions in specialised departments, the Mughals took long years to put into effect the subah system of government in Bengal. The province remained for many years a scene of confusion and anarchy and this state of affairs was certainly not conducive to the imposition of imperial peace and orderly administration on the province. Hence it would not be safe to overstress the fact of uniformity with regard to the Bengal administration during the period under review. In the midst of constant warfare and political strifes during the period between 1556 and 1627 as well as the repercussion of the war of succession on Bengal politics, it was hardly possible and feasible to achieve administrative systematisation to the same degree as it prevailed in comparatively more peaceful and settled provinces of the empire. Moreover the constant widespread frontier troubles (north-east and south-east) put enormous stresses and strains on the Mughal government in Bengal. Hence the evolution of the imperial administrative structure in Bengal was not peaceful and systematic.

However, Akbar for the first time appointed in Bengal the same uniform cadre of official heads as in other provinces, namely a governor (called Sipahsalar, later subahdar), a deputy-governor, a revenue minister (diwan), an inspector-general of the forces (bakhshi) and an admiral (Mir-Bahar) besides a civil judge (sadr), a criminal judge (Qazi), a police officer (Kotwal) and news-writer (Waqqa-navis). The first officers in Bengal were Wazir Khan and Muhib Ali (governors), Karamullah (diwan) and Shabhaz (bakhshi).

The subahdar was the executive head of the administration. The diwan like the subahdar directly appointed by the imperial court, was in charge of the financial organisation and enjoyed co-ordinate authority with the subahdar. The bakhshi, later 'mir-adl' was in charge of the military establishment, although he did not necessarily lead any campaign. He had to look after the well-being of the troops, their equipments and provisions. The mirbahar or the admiral was in charge of the Mughal 'nawara' (fleet). He was also directly appointed by the emperor and enjoyed a 'mansab'. He was independent of the subahdar, but at the time of campaign, he had to act under the advice and instruction of the subahdar who was technically the supreme commander of the imperial forces—both land and navy. The waqqa-navis or news-reporter was also directly appointed by the emperor

High ranking  
subah officials

and the subhadar had no direct jurisdiction over the waqa-navis. The provincial Qazi was a criminal judge who not only tried cases and heard appeals but also registered sales. The 'sadr' was the civil judge in charge of ecclesiastical grants and stipends. Civil disputes concerning marriage, divorce and such other related matters were tried by the Sadr. The continuation of the *Fathiyya-i-ibriyyah* refers to the 'Sadr' as one of the oppressive officers in Bengal. The kotwal was the chief police officers in the capital city who was in charge of maintaining peace and order in the city, apprehending criminals and recovering stolen goods. There are references to kotwal in important provincial towns and cities. Every important town and outpost had a 'kotwali chabutara'. The 'kroris' revenue collectors were in charge of particular areas. The *Baharistan* has often referred to an officer called 'Sardar'. The exact nature of the functions of the sadar is not quite clear. Presumably, the sadar was "in sole charge of the administration of such territories as might be put under his care, the duty of maintaining peace and security being particularly underlined".<sup>1</sup> The officer who was put in charge of Jessore and Sylhet immediately after their conquest has been called in the *Baharistan* as sadar. Even during the viceroyalty of Qasim Khan (1628-32) we came across an officer under the epithet 'sardar'. Lastly, there were the imperial mansabdars, ahadis and subhadar's officers who did not hold any specific office but were often called upon to discharge certain functions or responsibilities as thought necessary by the subhadar. These officers were generally called upon to participate in campaigns as well as in the establishment of peaceful administration in conquered region. Even the vassal landlords were sometimes called upon to take part in an imperial campaign. Raja Satrajit of Bhusna and Raja Raghunath of Shushang, played a prominent part in the consolidation of Mughal authority in Bengal and played a no less conspicuous part in the Mughal conquest of Kamrup and Sylhet. Besides, a numerous host of clerical and menial staff were attached to the different governmental departments.

As in other subahs of the empire, the administrative units like sarkars and parganas were also current in Bengal. The faujdar and shiqdar were in charge of sarkar and pargana respectively. Sometimes a faujdar was in charge of several parganas. During Akbar's time as well as during the first eight years of Jahangir's reign, the faujdar

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<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op.cit.*, p. 12.

was primarily a military officer in charge of a newly conquered territory. The faujdar was even in charge of a thana or military outpost looking after the security of the region. Sometimes a commander was appointed faujdar after the conquest of a territory and pacification of the locality. Suppression of the rebel elements, preservation of law and order and introduction of peaceful administration were the duties of the commander-cum-faujdar of a newly conquered territory. Besides faujdars, shiqdars and sardars, there was the post of wardens of marches in some strategic places as Rajmahal and Burdwan. The wardens of marches were primarily military officers entrusted with the task of ensuring the security of the border areas and maintaining the garrison. They enjoyed some amount of local initiative. The administration of the sarkar as also of the territory under the sardars, was to some extent a miniature replica of the subah administration. For the sarkar as well as for the unit under the sardars, a separate cadre of a diwan, a bakhshi and a waqa-navis was appointed who discharged the functions similar to those of their superior namesakes. Sometimes a single person was vested with the duties of the three officers.<sup>1</sup> Such was the general structure of the Mughal administration in Bengal till the close of Aurangzeb's reign.

It will be interesting to note how the system actually worked. As has been told earlier, the subahdar was the chief executive incharge of general administration—civil and military—of the subah. Only the persons in whom the emperor had absolute faith were appointed to the post of viceroy. The viceroy or subahdar was allowed a large degree of power in initiating administrative policy, of course, within the limits set by the imperial decrees. He enjoyed supervisory power over the entire administration both civil and military. So long as he remained loyal to the emperor as well as to the imperial regulations, his power was absolute and the officers were expected to obey his command unhesitatingly. In the words of Abul-Fazl, "He (Subahdar) is the viceregent of His Majesty. The troops and people of the province are under his order and their welfare depends upon his just administration." Only in the sphere of finance and revenue, the diwan enjoyed a practical monopoly of power which could not be interfered with by the subahdar. In fact, the diwan enjoyed a co-ordinate authority with the subahdar. In a word, the supreme

Powers of  
Subahdar

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<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op.cit.*, p. 13.

authority in civil matters was centralised in the hands of the subahdar, the diwan and their associates.

Although the subahdar was the supreme head of the government, in military matters he had to act in accordance with the advice of the commanders. Of course, such advice was not binding on the subahdar. There were numerous occasions when the viceroy even rejected the peace terms concluded by the campaigning general with the fallen foe. After the conquest of a territory, it was the commanding officer who enjoyed the initiative in the matter of administrative arrangements in the conquered tract. In some cases, military outposts were set up in order to maintain law and order. In others the subahdar might employ some trusted officers of his own in a region who would deal with the local affairs in their own way. Sometimes again the officers who conquered a territory entrusted the administration of that territory to their own men. For instance, after the submission of Pratapaditya, the imperial commander Ghiyas Khan was put in charge of the administration of Jessore and Tahir Muhammad, the bakhshi was sent to assess the revenue of Jessore and arrange for its due realisation. On the submission of Bayzid Karrani of Sylhet, the commanding officer Shaikh Kamal left a number of imperial officers under the command of Mubariz Khan in charge of the administration of the conquered territory. After the submission of the zamindars of Jahanabad, the imperial commander Mirza Nathan appointed his own brother as the faujdar of that region who made the necessary arrangements with the local zamindars. Again after the conquest of Kuch Bihar in 1665, an imperial faujdar, sent by Shaista Khan, took over the administration of that kingdom. Hence there was no any fixed rules regarding the posting of officers in the conquered regions. Everything depended on the existing situation as well as the whims of the subahdar. There are instances to show that the subahdar did not always approve the administrative arrangements made by the imperial officers in a conquered region. Whatever might have been the formal administrative regulations, it appears that the primary duty of the officers in charge of a particular region or territory was to establish law and order and to collect revenue either through their own men or through a krori.

The jagirs of the imperial officers were included within the areas directly administered by the provincial government. The officers holding jagirs were in sole authority of the jagirs under them which

they administered by their own men. Normally, the subahdar never interfered with the administration of the officers' jagirs. But under abnormal circumstances like internal rebellion or external danger, the provincial government intervened in the jagirs. Throughout the period under review, the provincial government seldom intervened in the administration of the officers' jagirs. Against an inefficient and oppressive jagirdar, the only remedy appears to have been his transfer to some other region. But such transfer did not necessarily mean any radical change in the internal administration of the jagir. The character of the jagir administration entirely depended on the whims and caprices of the jagirdar.<sup>1</sup>

As has been stated earlier, the sarkar and the pargana administration was a close replica of the subah administration. It would not be true to say that the officers in these administrative units were independent of the subahdar. Misrule and carelessness of the sarkar and pargana officers to the security problem often brought in the subahdar's intervention. They were not allowed to leave their posts without the subahdar's knowledge nor they were allowed to recruit troops without his permission. Leaving one's post without subahdar's permission was considered a great offence and might be punished severely either in the form of confiscation of jagir or imprisonment. Under no circumstance, the sarkar or pargana officers could withhold government revenue. The officers were cautious in their dealings with the people under their care. Complaints of misrule from the subjects called for harsh punishments. Possibilities of dismissal and cancellation of jagir served a great check on the whims and caprices of the officers in the sarkars and parganas. Another method of control over these officers was the occasional check-up of their muster-roll by the provincial bakshi.<sup>2</sup> The faujdars of the frontier posts were under constant watch and sometimes the security forces were put under an imperial commander. In a word, the subahdar always maintained a close contact with the sarkars and parganas.

**Administration of the territories under the local chiefs.** Beyond the directly administered territories lay the domain of numerous local chiefs holding practically semi-independent sway. These local chiefs

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

were both Hindus and Muslims. From the accession of Akbar till the first few years of Jahangir's reign, there flourished a large number of local chiefs who enjoyed political independence for all practical purposes. But after that period, most of them lost their political independence. Still their internal autonomy remained unaffected. The Bengal landlords popularly known as Baro-Bhuiyas were mostly upstarts who owed their origin to the political chaos and uncertainty during the period of transition from Afghan to Mughal overlordship. During this period of political transition, they grabbed territories and set themselves up as masterless Rajas in the different corners of the country especially in the inaccessible regions of Khulna, Bakerganj, north Mymensingh and Sylhet. Of these numerous chiefs who flourished during Akbar's time and the first eight years of Jahangir's accession, the most prominent were Kedar Rai, Isa Khan, Pratapaditya, Khwaja Usman, Bayzid Karrani, Raja Raghunath (Shushang), Satrajit (Bhusna), Musa Khan and others. They were not tribal heads nor scions of any old royal house. "... They had their brief day in the twilight between the setting Afghan kingship and the rising Mughal empire in Bengal and when the Mughal power came out, under Islam Khan in full splendour, they vanished into the obscurity from which they had risen."<sup>1</sup> These Bengali chiefs, again, should not be confounded with the princes of Kuch Bihar, Kamrup and Tippera who were representatives of long established tribal chieftains. But there was another class of landlords in Bengal who were hereditary lords of the land and descendants of various princelings who had carved out petty kingdoms for themselves long before the advent of the Mughals in Bengal. Of them, the most prominent were the Malla Rajas of Vana Bishnupur and the zamindar of Chandradwipa.

The administration of the territories under the local zamindars who were allowed to flourish by the Mughals was never uniform. The character of administration varied depending on the attitude of the imperial government towards the zamindars. Till the close of Akbar's reign, most of them not only enjoyed administrative autonomy but also political independence for all practical purposes. For instance, Isa Khan of Sonargaon, though ultimately submitted to the Bengal viceroy Raja Man Singh and professed lip-deep obedience to the Mughal emperor, he was independent for all practical purposes. Only

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 226.

Kedar Rai's domain was thoroughly annexed to the Mughal empire. During the reign of Jahangir, Islam Khan followed a more diplomatic and tortuous line of action. He played off the zamindars, one against the other, with promises of imperial favour and rewards, sometimes in the form of territories and thereby succeeded in crushing them one after another. After their submission or defeat, they were differently treated by the Mughal government. Sometimes parts of their territories—the whole in case of Jessore, part of Bakerganj, Bokainagar—were directly annexed and the rest was nominally restored to them or to their descendants and followers as jagir. They were forced to accept Mughal vassalage and were impressed into the imperial service. Again there were other landlords who, though submitted to the Mughals, were allowed independence to a great extent and were not required to attend the viceregal court nor render personal service like the other vassals. The zamindars of Birbhum, Pachet and Hijli may be mentioned in this connection. Musa Khan and his associates, the lesser landlords, were nominally given back their territories as jagirs but were actually deprived of them and compelled to render personal service. Khwaja Usman's domain was annexed, his army was disbanded and his brothers and sons were kept in confinement. In Eastern Bengal, those who willingly submitted to the imperialists and became their willing partners, for example, Raja Raghunath of Shushang and Raja Satrajit of Bhusna, were allowed to continue as before on their acceptance of imperial vassalage. These Rajas played a conspicuous part in the consolidation of the Mughal authority in Bengal and in the administration of the conquered regions. Again there are instances when an annexed territory was restored to its original holder after the latter voluntarily submitted to the Mughal government. Bahadur Khan, the ruler of Hijli who had been imprisoned by prince Shuja as a punishment for his act of rebellion, was subsequently restored to liberty and estate by Shaista Khan on his agreeing to pay one lakh of rupees as annual tribute.

It is difficult in the present state of our knowledge to understand the exact nature of the administration of the zamindars. For much depended on the relationship between them and the imperial government. Since the time of Ibrahim Khan's viceroyalty (1617-24), a more or less uniform relationship was established between the zamindars and the imperial government. The practice of annexing the estates of the zamindars was gradually given up since the time of Shah Jahan



and the agreement between the imperial government and the zamindars became more and more simple. Regular payment of revenue and welfare of the subjects became the normal conditions of vassalage. Sometimes a particular person, on grounds of loyalty and political exigency, was appointed zamindar of a particular locality. For instance, a farman of Shah Jahan called upon the mansabdar, jagirdars, chaudhuris and qanungos to acknowledge the Raja of Narayan-garh as the zamindar of that locality and allowed him to enjoy full internal autonomy without any interference by the Mughal government. The zamindar, in return, had to give the undertaking of remitting annual revenue regularly and looking after the welfare of the subjects under his care. The relationship between the Raja of Shushang and the imperial government was firmly settled during the viceroyalty of Prince Shuja whereby the Raja agreed to send regularly 'agar' wood and ivory as annual tribute. In the coastal region of lower Bengal, the zamindars were assigned 'nawara' lands in return for their services against the Magh-Feringi pirates. These zamindars were under obligation to maintain war-boats at their own expense for the security of the coastal region against the depredations of the Magh and the Feringis. The landlords of Chandradwip and the Thakurtas of Banaripara may be mentioned in this connection. Although the imperial government did not normally intervene in the internal administration of the zamindars, in certain cases intervention or retribution was not slow to come. Non-payment of revenue, oppression on ryots, rebellion or the viceroy's ill-will led to intervention. By way of punishment, sometimes the guilty zamindars were deprived of their zamindari rights. Succession was normally hereditary although fresh investiture was required for succession.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, it would be reasonable to suppose that within their estate, the zamindars enjoyed almost unrestricted power. As Grant writes: "The zamindars as native guardians of the public peace and private rights relieved their ignorant voluptuous Mussalman rulers from the intricate troublesome detail of internal police and management of Mofussil collections." Although this generalisation of Grants regarding the power and privileges of the zamindars during the Mughal period does not seem to be wholly correct, it cannot be gainsaid that in regard to peace and security, the zamindars were masters of the

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op.cit.*, p. 21.

situation within their domain. Even a petty landlord was all-powerful in his estate where imperial regulations hardly made any penetration. According to Westland the zamindars "were contractors for the general administration and the duties of police were in their hands and they had to keep up police establishments". Criminal and civil disputes among the ryots were adjudged by the zamindars themselves or by their officers. Only criminal offences of grave nature like rebellion or acts of sabotage were dealt with by the provincial government.

Whatever might have been the powers and privileges of the zamindars, it cannot be denied that the autonomous rule of the zamindars was seldom beneficial to their subjects.

**Oppressive nature of the rule of the zamindars** Literature and local traditions refer to inhuman torture and oppressions of the zamindars on their subjects. Hundreds and thousands of the poor and helpless ryots were subjected to slavery by their masters without any interference from the imperial government. Emperor Aurangzeb was particularly anxious to protect the common people against the oppressions of their landlords. He instructed Mir Jumla specifically to pacify the people and to chastise the unruly. It was in the days of Sarfaraz Khan that serious efforts were made to intervene more directly in the affairs of the zamindars and certain restrictions were imposed on their autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

**Revenue Administration.** Unlike the Turko-Afghan rulers of Bengal, the Mughal rulers were very much interested in levying and collecting revenue as the Mughal government was a settled government in Bengal. From the time of Akbar's accession till 1590, Mughal rule in Bengal was more like an armed occupation than a settled administration and the effective control of the Mughal government was confined to very narrow limits—not stretching far beyond the capital city and the few fortified posts set up by the imperial generals and faujdars. The early years of the Mughal conquest were years of stresses and strains when the province was not ready to accept any settled form of administration. The Mughal governors of Akbar's time, notably Raja Man Singh, contended themselves with securing nominal submission of the old independent Afghan and Hindu landlords and did not make any serious attempt to regularise financial matters with them. Upon his entry into the capital of Bengal, 1574,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

the Mughal governor Munim Khan assisted by Raja Rodar Mal only could collect booty from the inhabitants of the city and the adjoining regions. It was during 1580's that some sort of a revenue administration began to develop in the directly administered areas. Abul Falz's *Ain-i-Akbari* has scantily referred to the revenue system in Bengal under the Mughals. It runs, "the demands of each year are paid by instalments in eight months, they (the ryots) themselves bringing 'mohurs' and rupees to the appointed place for the receipt of revenue, as the division of grain between the government and the husbandman is not here customary. The harvests are always abundant, measurement is not insisted upon and the revenue demands are determined by estimate of the crop. His Majesty in his goodness has confirmed this custom". It is evident from this brief account that the annual 'demands' were paid in eight monthly instalments and that the payments were made in cash and that directly to the government. The mode of direct payment was of course only prevalent in the directly administered parts of the khalsa lands. In the *Baharistan*, there is a reference to two collections a year. Presumably the mode of payment in eight monthly instalments gave way to the mode of half-yearly payments. Again the *Ain-i-Akbari* has referred to the method of crop-estimation and not measurement while dealing with the Bengal revenue during Akbar's time. But it is to be noted that although the government did not insist on measurement, it was not altogether unknown in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> In Mukundaram's *Chandimangala*, there are references to measurement as a basis of fixing the revenue. The *Baharistan* has also referred to measurement.

In 1586 Akbar on the advice of Raja Todar Mal fixed the total annual revenue of Bengal at rupees 10,693,152 of which the revenues of the crown-lands and the jagirs were fixed at rupees 6,344,260 and rupees 434,889 respectively.<sup>2</sup> The income from the jagir was spent on the salaries and emoluments of the officers, while the income from the crown-lands went straight into the royal exchequer. According to Todar Mal's revenue settlement the directly administered areas of Bengal were divided into 19 sarkars and 682 parganas. This settlement was known as 'zama tumar' (cash realisation). During the vicerealty of Shuja, Todar Mal's settlement (Zama Tumar) was

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Chahar Gulsam and Khulasat*, Eng. trans. by J. N. Sarkar, vide, *India of Aurangzeb*, p. 46.

slightly modified whereby 15 more sarkars and 668 more parganas were added to the older divisions. As a result, the total receipts from the revenue came to rupees 2,422,755. In fact, this increase in revenue receipts was due to the annexations of some parts of Orissa to Bengal. But towards the close of Shuja's viceroyalty, the state income from the crown-lands went down to a great extent as more and more the mansabdars and other imperial officers were assigned jagirs in the crown-lands. Again, as the jagirs of the mansabdars were scattered in different parganas and as there were many co-partners, the peasants there were subjected to oppression. Moreover, the method of collection of revenue also was wasteful. Mir Jumla made certain experiments to remove the anomalies. He confirmed in his own jagir a large number of free-holders (aimadars) and stipend-holders. The 'aimadars' were asked to till the land and pay the revenue. But the 'aimadars' hard-pressed as they were, could not cultivate the land satisfactorily and hence there was no gain on that score.<sup>1</sup> During Shaista Khan's viceroyalty, the total measured area of the Bengal Subah was estimated at 334,775 'bighas', a figure very much smaller than that for other subahs; the sarkars were 27 in number comprising 1,109 mahals. The total revenue was fixed at 46 crores and 29 lakh 'dams' (Rs. 1,172,500).<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the Mughal period, excluding the jagirs of the mansabdars and other officers, all over the subah the state had no direct contact with the ryots. In other words, farming of revenue was not fully in vogue. In eastern Bengal, due to frequent changes in the course of the rivers and rivulets, the government demand on land was flexible. On this ground, in eastern Bengal some sort of farming system was required to be enforced. The contractor or the 'jagirdar' was required to undertake an agreement to pay a fixed revenue to the state.

During the period under review, the income of the government was mainly derived from two sources, viz. land (mal) revenue and 'sair' duties, imposed on a variety of imports primarily on personal property.

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> *Chahar Gulsam and Khulasat*, Eng. trans. by J. N. Sarkar, vide, *India of Aurangzeb*, pp. 46, 133.

The revenue-yielding land was divided into three classes. Firstly, the crown-land directly administered by the government. Secondly, the jagir-lands assigned to the officers in lieu of their salaries. Thirdly, the lands assigned to the landlords. Generally the lands or territories already in possession of the landlords were assigned to them formally on their acceptance of imperial vassalage. The crown-lands or the khalsa were either directly administered by the provincial government or farmed out to revenue-farmers. They were known as 'mustajirs'. The income accrued from this source directly went to the imperial exchequer. The khalsa-revenue might either be collected through the agency of the 'kroris' or faujdars or individual officers might be entrusted with the duty of collecting the same. As the author of the *Baharistan* writes, "whatever (revenue) falls short in the crown-lands must be written in the name of some one". In each conquered region or territory, a large tract of land was chosen for khalsa and the officer-in-charge of the conquered region or the diwan of that region initially made arrangements for collection of revenue. The diwan or the officer had to assess and prepare the rent-roll. The rent-roll or the register of revenue was to be prepared on the basis of "an estimate of the revenues". After the preparation of the register, the qanungo put his seal on it and then the entire conquered region was divided into well-defined circles or 'chaklas' and these chaklas were entrusted to mustajirs, kroris and faujdars.<sup>1</sup>

Grant in his *Political Survey of the Northern Circars* has referred to a variety of imposts as 'sair' duties in Bengal during the Mughal rule, viz. customs ('mahsool'), inland-toll ('rahdary'), tax levied on the merchandise and grain ('chowkis') carried to market, tax on retail merchants in town and stalls in country fairs ('panderry'), customs (hasil) collected from artificers, traders and khushnashin (well-to-do men) Hindus and Muslims alike, 'ferroay faujdarry', i.e. 'produce of fines, confiscations', etc. and one-fourth of the "sums litigated in the civil courts" (the 'chouth'). Although 'jiziya' was not collected in Bengal as in other parts of the empire in the days of Akbar and Jahangir, it is on record that Shaista Khan remitted to Aurangzeb in 1682 one lakh of rupees as jiziya collected in Bengal. As to the 'sair' duties Shihabuddin Talish writes, "from the first occupation of India and its ports by the

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<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

Muhammadans to the end of Shah Jahan's reign, it was a rule and practice to exact 'hasil' (custom) from every trader, from the rose-vendor down to the clay-vendor, from the weaver of fine linen to that of coarse cloth". Besides the 'sair' duties, the 'zakat' (one-fortieth of the annual income) was collected from merchants and travellers. In the days of Mir Jumla, the price of grain rose in Bengal owing to the high rate of zakat. Towards the close of the period under review, 'rah-dary' became a source of great oppression. Talish writes, "on the roads and ferries matters came to such a pass that no rider was allowed to go unless he paid a 'dinar' and no pedestrain unless he paid a 'diram.' On the river highways, if the stream was carrying away a broken boat without paying 'hasil', they would chain the river". (Vide, *J.A.S.B.*, 1907.) Acting on the order of Aurangzeb, Shaista Khan abolished zakat and hasil in the parganas of the crown-land. The viceroy had a free choice in his jagir with regard to all exactions except the rahdary and the prohibited cesses (abwabs). Shaista Khan abolished hasil amounting to 15 lakhs of rupees. All these imposts were in vogue in the officers' jagirs as well as in the crown-lands.

There were two classes of jagirs—one for the maintenance of the officers themselves or personal jagirs and the other for the maintenance of their soldiers or for the upkeep of the fleet particularly in the coastal region (nawara-jagir as it was called). The officers used to parcel out the non-personal jagirs among his soldiers and subordinates who naturally enjoyed rent-free tenures. The officers holding personal jagirs used to appoint their own officers and others to manage the jagirs and to collect revenue. The officers had their own diwans to regulate and administer the revenue affairs. The provincial government normally did not interfere with the affairs of the officers' jagirs.

The provincial diwan was in overall charge of the revenue administration. Although he was under the supervision of the subahdar, as the former was directly appointed by the emperor, he was responsible to the central diwan. As a result, in the days of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the provincial diwan practically became independent of the subahdar and even slighted the latter's authority. Aurangzeb's two farmans dealt with the duties of the diwan in details regarding the assessment and collection of revenue. The diwan was to encourage cultivation of land and irrigation, to protect the ryots against the oppression of the

Revenue arrangements in jagirs

Revenue officials

officials, to 'whip' the defaulting ryots and to reward the honest revenue officers.<sup>1</sup>

Next to the diwan, there was a staff of subordinate and semi-official functionaries who assisted in the collection of revenue. Of them, the most noted were the 'amil', the 'karkun', 'krori', 'qanungos' and the 'choudhuris'. In each sarkar, the amil was the chief revenue officer who resembled something like the collector of the modern times. He enjoyed supreme control over the assessment and collection of revenue. He was to submit monthly report to the diwan regarding the income and expenditure as well as the condition of the ryots in the sarkar under his charge. As soon as the revenue collection exceeded two lakh dams, the entire amount was required to be remitted to the imperial exchequer. The subahdar could not dismiss the amil but he could recommend for such dismissal. The karkun or the registrar of the collection of revenue was a government employee and associated with the krori. The qanungos were hereditary local assessors who maintained accounts regarding the crops and cultivated lands. They assisted the government in the preparation of the rent-roll. The choudhuris or village-headmen sometimes directly collected revenue from the ryots. "Evidences of direct payment, found in the Ain as also in the Baharistan, however, disprove quite clearly the theory put forward by Moreland that collections were made through farmers and village headmen only."<sup>2</sup> There were 'mutasuddis' who checked the accounts and rent-rolls furnished by the choudhuris. The mutasuddis were also associated with other branches of administration. Besides the officials mentioned above, there were others like the khazanchi (treasurer) and 'patwari'. The former was to keep in safe-custody the revenue collected, to send the money to the imperial treasury and not to expend a single coin without the diwan's permission.

The revenue machinery was not in strict operation everywhere. In a newly-conquered region or in an unsettled region, the officer on the spot had to arrange everything for the assessment and collection of revenue. Gradually the regular machinery was set up.

The estates of the zamindars were treated as jagirs assigned to them back by the imperial government as their jagirs upon their acceptance of vassalage. The zamindars were under obligation to pay tribute to the government in cash and kind regularly.

<sup>1</sup> Saran, *Provincial Government of the Mughals*, pp. 282-84.

<sup>2</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

Sometimes the amount payable by them was fixed. Of course during the period under review, fixed cash demands on the zamindars are not clearly in evidence. During the Revenue system in the zamindari estates vicerealty of Shaista Khan we came across references to cash payment by the zamindars in a lump sum and sometimes in goods. Neither the lands under the zamindars were ever assessed. But they were expected to be regular in the payment of their tributes or peshkash. In the case of default intervention from the imperial government was not slow to come and in some cases the punishment was severe. Otherwise, the zamindars within their estates were supreme in revenue matters and managed the same as they pleased. The zamindars used to give 'patta' acknowledging thereby the tenancy rights of the ryots who in turn executed 'qabuliyats' or deeds of agreement. The sub-tenancy system also was in vogue. A class of people took lands from the zamindars on condition of a fixed rent and distributed the same among lesser tenants on certain conditions which were varied in character.

Besides the land-tax, the zamindars levied numerous extra-imposts. They used to get from the traders, merchants and crop-producers various articles as tribute. Those who enjoyed rent-free land from the zamindars, had to render various types of voluntary services to the latter. They used to receive from the tenants at the time of the first settlement a lump sum as 'salami'. A share of the crops or a share of the tenants' merchandise was normally taken by the zamindars' employees. Oppression on the ryots was the normal practice and non-payment of land-revenue or abwabs was severely dealt with by the zamindars. Seldom the ryots got any relief in the form of remission of taxes due to natural calamities like flood, draught, etc.

#### *A Critical Estimate of Mughal Rule in Bengal (Merits and Drawbacks)*

The effects of Mughal rule upon the province require a critical examination. The period of Mughal imperial rule over the province witnessed the working of certain forces which transformed the Bengali life to a considerable degree.

Despite the extortionate character of some aspects of the financial administration, certain claims are made in favour of Mughal imperial rule in Bengal. The most important contribution of the Mughals was the political unity of the province. After long years of political



turmoil and bitter strife since the accession of Akbar, Bengal by the end of Jahangir's reign settled down to enjoy the blessings of Mughal peace. Of course in a comparative sense with the elimination of the independent and semi-independent chieftains and landlords, both Hindus and Muslim, Bengal's political unity came back and the province was included into the general pattern of the Mughal empire.

Bengal's political  
unity and  
internal peace

Throughout the province the authority of one master, the emperor, was firmly established and Bengal for all intents and purposes was transformed into a subah of the empire. The history of the years 1575-1594 is a sickening tale of local offensives with varying results so far as the Bengal chieftains and the imperialists were concerned. But the weak and the innocent suffered most at the hands of both the parties. With the consolidation of the imperial authority that phase came to an end and the people slowly began to reap the blessings of the imperial rule. Again, not only Bengal proper came under the effective control of the imperial government but also the mighty Mughal arms were extended to protect the outlying regions from the recurrent depredations of the Maghs and the Feringis. The conquest of Chittagong in 1666 assured peace and security in the riverine tracts of Bengal after centuries of miserable plight of the people in those tracts. This was a no mean achievement of the Mughals in Bengal.

With the inclusion of the province into the general pattern of the Mughal empire, it came into direct contact with the rest of the empire. "In one word, during the first century of Mughal rule (1575-1675), the outer world came to Bengal and Bengal went out of herself to the outer world, and the economic, social and cultural changes that grew out of this mingling of peoples mark a most important and distinct stage in the evolution of modern Bengal."<sup>1</sup>

Bengal's contact  
with Upper India  
and Central and  
Western Asia

Of course, it would not be correct to say that Bengal had no contact with the rest of India prior to the Mughal conquest. During the Turko-Afghan age, Bengal had contacts with northern India although on a very limited scale. The Turko-Afghan rulers of Delhi often appointed their nominees to rule over the province and under their rule Lakhnawti became a replica of the imperial court of Delhi in grandeur and magnificence. To suppress the rebel governors of Lakhnawti, the lords of Delhi had to invade Bengal from time to

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 216.

time. It was only for a short time that a barrier was created between the two regions after the accession of Akbar and the subsequent continuation of Afghan rule in Bengal under the Sur governor and the Karranis. Even in the field of religion and culture Bengal had relation with the provinces of upper and southern India in the pre-Mughal days. The Mughal conquest of Bengal re-established Bengal's contact through upper India by land-routes with the countries of central and western Asia, "which Bengal had lost first when Buddhism became dead in the land of its birth". Along with political unity and peace, the Mughals set up regularised administration in Bengal. With its graded hierarchy and departmental organisation, the subah administration brought all classes of people from the highest to the lowest into close contact with the government. Within the province, from one corner to another, a single political authority was universally acknowledged. The military outposts set up in different parts of the country made the communications within the province more safe than what they had been before. Moreover, the people who long suffered at the hands of oppressive local officials without any opportunity of appealing to the supreme authority, now got at least an opportunity to do so. And in fact, the possibility of getting their grievances redressed was not wholly precluded.<sup>1</sup> Of course, it would be again wrong to suppose that there was nothing like a regularised administration in the pre-Mughal days. The administrative system that the Mamluk rulers (1227-1278 A.D.) of Bengal introduced in the province was a close copy of the administrative system of Delhi Sultanate—"a hierarchy of decentralised minor sovereignties of a feudal character". It can be claimed in favour of the Husain Shahi dynasty that it established some sort of a centralised administration with a number of administrative departments, although feudal character of the administration did not entirely evaporate.

In the wake of political peace and settled government there came economic prosperity. The imperial peace which by the middle of the 17th century had settled on Bengal led to an immense growth of the province's inland and sea-borne trade in the first through Indian and foreign agency and the second through European agency. Although political disorder and unrest prevailed in the province from time to time as evident from the accounts of Ralph Fitch and Mirza Nathan, by and large the province did not suffer from

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op.cit.*, p. 38.

any major internal upheaval or external aggression. Continuance of peace and political stability encouraged the Indian and foreign merchants from the neighbouring countries as well as the European traders to flock to the marts of Bengal to sell their various merchandise and to purchase Bengal's products both agricultural and manufactured. The growth of sea-borne trade through European agency was undoubtedly the major gain of Bengal during the Mughal rule. Towards the close of Ibrahim Khan's viceroyalty, agriculture and commerce considerably improved and manufactures were carried to a degree of perfection they had never attained before. The textile industry was directly encouraged. The delicate muslins of Dacca and silks of Malda constituted the chief part of the dress of the imperial court and these industries received great impetus. Dacca became the chief mart of Bengal ; its trade and industries developed, its commerce flourished and thereby it attracted a large foreign travellers and foreign merchants. It was during Mughal rule in Bengal that the English, the Dutch and the French along with other foreign companies established their factories and carried on sea-borne trade which went on increasing. The European exporters gave a great impetus to industrial production in Bengal. They also organised the industrial production of the province with a view to making it more efficient and economical.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, it cannot be doubted that a new era was dawning in the history of Bengal. "These were the fruits, the truly glorious fruits of Mughal peace."

The beneficial effects of Mughal rule should not be exaggerated. From the beginning of the Mughal conquest of Bengal till 1615, there was chaos and confusion all around. Ralph Fitch who visited Bengal in 1587 referred to the troubled state of the province, "infested with rebels". Even as late as 1616, the English factors of Surat did not think it safe to carry on trade and commerce in Bengal due to the prevailing political instability and insecurity. Towards the close of Jahangir's reign, peace was greatly disturbed due to prince Shah Jahan's rebellion. Even in the days of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, wars and rebellions seriously disturbed the life of the common man. Men and women, old and infant all alike suffered terribly due to constant wars and campaigns. The conquering generals' and officers' lust for gold or wealth wrought terrible havoc. The

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<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 219.

sufferings of the captives at the hands of the imperial officers are beyond description. The imperial troops in course of their campaigns in a rebel country invariably laid waste the crops and they seized the ryots captive. There was no machinery nor any means to stop such vandalism. The continuous campaigns not only hampered cultivation but also adversely affected trade and commerce. This state of affairs continued with intervals almost to the end of the period under review.

With the expansion of the Mughal territories to the riverine tracts of Bengal, the imperial power came to open clash with the Magh and Feringi pirates, whose frequent depredations constituted a great menace to Mughal peace. The cavalry, hitherto, the mainstay of the imperial army, proved practically useless in the riverine tracts of eastern and south-eastern tracts of Bengal. The imperialists were weak in war-boats and weaker still in trained mariners. The imperialists never took pains in building up an efficient naval power which was the only effective instrument of war in these regions. This laxity on the part of the imperial government gave much encouragement to the sea-rovers. It was only when Shaista Khan built up a grand naval force and conquered Chittagong that peace and security came back to these regions.

Even after various experiments, the imperial administration in Bengal was never a picture of perfection. The emperor's hold and control over the provincial government was limited in extent. The emperor's farmans and ordinances could not check the whims and caprices of the subahdars nor could stop their oppressions on the ryots. No envoy could come from or go to the imperial court without the viceroy's permission. Sometimes the imperial messengers were put to chains with impunity. The imperial court also could not prevent the subahdars from private-trading (*sauda-i-khash*) which did a lot of harm to the local traders and agriculturists. It was only when Aurangzeb sternly objected to such trade, that the Bengal viceroy Azim-us-Shan stopped this long established illegal practice.

The provincial administration was not free from defects. Official oppression was not only the cause of administrative inefficiency but also a source of loss to the imperial exchequer. The jealousy between imperial and subah-officers, quarrel regarding the question of precedence as between fellow-officers, the subahdar's whims and caprices—all these rendered smooth functioning of the government sometimes impossible. The system of assignment of jagirs to the officers was a serious drawback of the provincial administration. Because within their holdings, the officers were almost supreme with little fear of

interference from the subahdar. The rule of the officers within their jagirs was autocratic and oppressive. The subahdar interfered only when such oppression assumed a serious proportion. Seizure of ryots' wives and children by the high officers was a common affair. The *Eastern Bengal Ballads* contain numerous references to such crimes. The soldiers constituted a disgruntled class. Often their salaries fell in arrears which caused much resentment amongst them and they remained a class thoroughly disgruntled. The pay-clerks were thoroughly corrupt and they withheld the salaries of the soldiers on some pretext or other. Even as late as Aurangzeb's days, the 'naqdi' troopers once revolted and crowded round the diwan Murshid Kuli Khan, clamouring for instant payment of their arrears.

The revenue administration also suffered from serious defects. It lacked uniformity. Within their jagirs, the officers were free to levy taxes and tolls as they pleased without any interference from the provincial government. The revenue-contractors or 'ijaradars' likewise could enhance the assessment to their advantage and there was none to prevent them from doing so. The practice of levying 'abwabs' by the officers and the zamindars put the ryots and the traders to a miserable plight without any means of redress. Talish has given a gruesome picture of such affair in his *Fathiyya*. Even those who had been enjoying rent-free land on personal or religious grounds were not spared by the imperial officers.

## CHAPTER 12

### THE ZAMINDARS OF BENGAL DURING MUGHAL RULE

#### *The Zamindari System*

The abstract etymology of the term 'Zamindar' means a land (zamin) holder (dar). In revenue practice a zamindar is one who holds a portion of land described as pargana or a considerable portion thereof.

The issue of the exact meaning of the term zamindar was debated during Warren Hasting's governorship. The question which was uppermost in the minds of the early English administrators was : "Is the sovereign or are the zamindars the owners of all land in India ?"

In this controversy the etymological meaning of the term zamindar was pressed in order to make good the assertion dogmatically made by Philip Francis of the zamindar's ownership. "The question 'who is the landlord ?' was probably not merely so much in the minds of the Company's servants as Francis supposed. The abstract question of the Zamindar's right of property was one which Hastings expressly declined to deal with."<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of the word zamindar varies from region to region in India. In some parts of the country the term is used in the sense of a landlord, while in others it is used in the sense of government revenue officials. According to Firminger's *Fifth Report*, "The difficulty involved in the controversy lay in the fact that the term zamindar included persons whose relation to the lands in their enjoyment was of a very varying character. By a zamindar might be meant the representative of some ancient Hindu sovereignty ; it might mean a government farmer who in recent years had acquired his zamindari by inserting himself in the place of the dispossessed and it might mean the occupant of but a single parganah. But, setting aside the issue as to ownership, it was clear that all these kinds of zaminders had at last one function in regard to the state—they were one and all answerable for the yield to government of the sovereign's portion of the harvest in kind or in pecuniary equivalent . . . and this function was expressed in writing by the terms of their sanads or patents of appoint-

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<sup>1</sup> Firminger, *Fifth Report, etc.*, p. 48.

ments. Whatever might be put forward as to ownership, hereditary succession, etc. it could not affect the fact that the right of the sovereign to participate in the produce of the soil was even more ancient and more firmly established in native ideas than any claim that could be asserted as to the right of any single zamindar."<sup>1</sup>

During the rule of the Hindu princes, the tenancy right of the ryot was recognised. But according to Muslim state-craft, the king was the sole owner of the land. During the rule of the Muslim rulers, a host of officials under various designations like amin, zamindar, talukdar were employed in the work of revenue collection. In the provinces, the government used to collect revenue from the zamindars who in turn used to collect the same from the ryots. The zamindars were under obligation to maintain peace and order within their estates. But the zamindars did not enjoy proprietary rights.

Regarding the origin of the zamindars, George Cambell writes that during the hey-day of the Muslim rule in Bengal, there was no intermediary landholder between the government and the ryots. But with the gradual decline of the Muslim rule, there grew up a large number of feudal landlords who grabbed territories and assumed semi-independent and sometimes independent position. Cambell further writes that during the declining days of the Muslim rule, government revenue officers were turned into landlords and as most of the ranks of the Hindu officers were hereditary, the title of zamindar also became hereditary.<sup>2</sup> Harrington in his *Fields Introduction*, writes that the zamindars collected revenue from the ryots. The tenancy of the zamindars was hereditary, but at the time of their installation, they had to pay peshkash to the emperor and 'nazar' to the Subahdar ; they could sell, mortgage or transfer their tenancy-rights, securing necessary permission beforehand ; the revenue settlement was made only with the zamindars, this was the general practice ; but sometimes the settlement was made with some other person ; whatever was collected from the ryots beyond the fixed revenue, belonged to the zamindars but for all collections, they had to submit accounts ; the zamindars were responsible for the maintenance of peace and security within their estates ; they had to apprehend the criminals and send them to qazis for necessary punishment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Vide, S. C. Chatterjee, *Murshidabad Katha*, II, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The statements of George Cambell and Harrington have not clarified the issue. The questions as to the exact definition of the terms 'zamindar' and 'zamindari' as well as the relations between the government and the zamindars and the rights and duties of the latter remain to be answered.

Todar Mal's settlement of land-revenue of Bengal was known as Asal Jama Tumar for many generations. Todar Mal's settlement of land-revenue in Bengal was made with the landlords whom Abul Fazl has described as "rich, powerful and numerous". According to a Mughal officer of the Khalsa, "a zamindar is a person possessing hereditary rights on the condition of obedience to the ordinances of government a tract of land under the denomination of a parganah or chakla subject to the payment of revenue". A zamindari is that sort of land registered in the government record in the name of such person. Dwelling on the zamindari system under the Mughals, Shore writes, "the relation of a zamindar to the government and of a ryot to zamindar is neither that of proprietor nor vassal but a compound of both". According to Shore, the zamindari system under the Mughals was never consistent everywhere.

The zamindars were of various kinds. Some of them flourished long before the introduction of Muslim rule in Bengal who submitted to the Muslim conquerors and agreed to pay revenue to the latter and hence they were allowed to enjoy the estates in their possession. The second kind of zamindars were those who cleared off jungles and brought that land under proper cultivation. They were known as jungle-lords. The third kind of zamindars were those who were assigned lands as free-gifts. The fourth kind of zamindars were called Sanady zamindars who were granted a certain tract of waste land to be brought under cultivation, after which the zamindars paid revenue to the government.<sup>1</sup> In reply to the query of the Revenue Board of Bengal consisting of the whole English Council regarding the nature of zamindari, Shitab Ray replied thus, "when a zamindar dies, his son succeeds to the zamindari according to the custom of the suba of Bihar, but the king is entitled to the revenue of it. The great zamindar for the sake of greater security receives a sanad from the king. The king never

<sup>1</sup> N. K. Sinha, *Zamindari System in Bengal, etc.*, vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1957, Vol. 75, Pt. I.



grants one but to the lawful heir. In case this heir is not able to pay the revenue, he may sell the zamindari. In case after a zamindar's death, his sons happened not to obtain possession of it, when they afterwards appear and claim it and are ready to pay the revenue, the king's officers considering their hereditary rights, will give them possession even after some generations. The revenue belongs to the king but the land to the zamindar".<sup>1</sup> On the question of the zamindar's right of selling or mortgaging his property without the sanction of the government, Warren Hastings was of opinion that the alienation of zamindari was not usual practice except for the purpose of enabling the seller to pay the revenue to the government. But Hastings found so many instances of private sale of zamindari property in the Dacca district that he came to the conclusion that the custom in that district authorised private sale. On the question of the zamindar's right of alienating his property by a deed of gift, Barwell, a member of the Council admitted that "under the Mughals, purchases and grants of land were common throughout the provinces and were made even without the participation of the ruler. Yet his sanction to such alienation of property. . . was so essential that it was generally solicited and I believe in every instance with effect".<sup>2</sup> Most of the members of the English Council were of the opinion that though in principle the land was not alienable by gift or sale, such custom was very common in Bengal before the grant of the Diwani. It would not be wrong to suppose that zamindari in Bengal during Mughal rule was much more than customary hereditary occupancy. Although government had the right in principle, to deprive the zamindars of their property, the rights and privileges of the latter were real and only under exceptional circumstances, they were deprived of their zamindaries. In fact, the act of dispossessing the old zamindars of the twenty-four parganas after the battle of Plassey was against the spirit of Mughal revenue policy. During the rule of the Mughals, the custom of granting 'moshaira' or maintenance allowance to the dispossessed zamindars was in vogue. Generally the amount of such allowance was one-tenth of the revenue due to the government.

From the sanads and parwanas issued to quite a large of zamindars by the Mughal emperors and subahdars, it appears that the zamindars enjoyed almost hereditary proprietary rights over their estates and were responsible for the payment of revenue and the

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

maintenance of peace and order. "...in those days the zamindars amongst other duties would appear to have performed police duties and were held responsible for maintenance of peace in their mahals—the village chowkeedars and watchmen being directly under them. They were also in charge of village ferries, village ponds and village roads in their mahals, and performed more or less the duties of 'justice of the peace'. They were more or less quasi-official functionaries and received sanads on appointment and were liable to removal for gross misconduct. Their mahals were not liable to auction-sale for arrears of revenue, but liable to attachment by the Crown for realisation of revenue and defaulting zamindars were liable to punishment. They were quasi-state functionaries or quasi-official landed aristocracy maintained by Mussalman sovereign for state purposes. They were quite a different species from the Bengal zamindars of to-day."<sup>1</sup> The zamindar was to receive 'rasum' and 'nankar'. In the district of Burdwan a 'mothot' or capitation contribution by the ryots enabled the zamindar to meet the charges of certain kinds of relief works. 'Begar' or unpaid services of the ryots were also requisitioned for this purpose by most of the zamindars. The zamindars were responsible for robberies and thefts committed in their estates and this was an ancient usage. In bigger estates, there were 'bakshis' immediately under the zamindars. It was the responsibility of the 'bakshi' to compensate the sufferer for his loss. The travellers were furnished with safe convoys and the merchants were also protected in the conveyance of their merchandise. "It would not be perhaps wrong to infer that the estates of the zamindars must have been much more valuable than they were during the period from 1772 to 1793. This alone could have enabled them to make good occasional losses."<sup>2</sup> This system was in vogue in the settled areas during Mughal administration. It is difficult to ascertain when such privileges were extended to the zamindars. But it cannot be doubted that these privileges led to a number of serious abuses. As Lord Cornwallis might well write to the Court of Directors in 1789 (18th September) thus : "I cannot conceive that any government in their senses would ever have delegated as authorised right to any of their subjects to enforce arbitrary taxes on the internal commerce of the country. It certainly has been an abuse that has crept in either through the negligence of the Mughal Governors who were careless and ignorant of all matters of trade, or what is more probable con-

<sup>1</sup> Riyaz, F. N. p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> K. N. Sinha, Vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1957, Vol. 75, Pt. I.

nivance of the Mussalman aumil who tolerated the extortion of the zamindars that he might plunder him in his turn.”<sup>1</sup> Although the English rulers of Bengal were opposed to these privileges of the zamindars, for a considerable time they did not think it expedient to abolish them without some recompense being made for the loss. It is to be noted that abuses of the privileges enjoyed by the zamindars were wide-spread in big zamindaries. With a view to lessen such abuses, attempts were made since the time of Murshid Kuli Khan to agglomerate the smaller zamindaries. Still the smaller zamindars could not be wholly squeezed out. They were still very numerous. The smaller zamindars and talukdars who paid their land revenue either direct to the government or to the bigger zamindars had direct contact with the ryots under them. “It was admitted by the early British administrators that the smaller zamindars and talukdars were generally quite efficient. The charge of incapacity could be made only against big zaminders.”<sup>2</sup> The smaller zamindars enjoyed certain advantages over the bigger zamindars as the former held their estates by right of inheritance whereas the latter received a Diwani Sanad from the government in confirmation of their succession.

Dwelling on the zamindari system in Bengal, Prof. Sinha observes: “A Bengal Zamindar in the Mughal period combined two relations. He had valuable property rights. He also discharged some functions, of an officer of the Government. This dual character should be borne in mind. The evils and abuses which crept into revenue administration, particularly during the period between 1757 and 1772, made the picture very much confused. A tendency towards simplification which ignored the realities of a situation, made the confusion worse confounded. A rigid, regular and summary method of land revenue settlement was adopted which made it difficult in subsequent times to understand the state of things before the British began their land revenue experiments. European analogy became fashionable. Attention was concentrated only in the big zamindars of the days of Murshid Kuli and his successors. The term zamindar came to have a very unhistorical connotation.”<sup>3</sup>

Hence it can be safely assumed that the zamindari system or more precisely the system of intermediary landholdings was in vogue in Bengal long before the Mughal rule although its character varied from time to time and from region to region. There was a class of local

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

intermediaries during the Turko-Afghan period in Bengal besides the Muslim nobles who enjoyed jagirs. These intermediaries had direct

Conclusion contact with the ryots from whom they collected land-tax and paid a portion of it to the jagirdars. Of course, the Turko-Afghan rulers of Bengal had never any direct contact with the ryots nor was there any standard of assessment. During the Mughal rule efforts were made to regularise the landholding system. Excepting in the khalsa lands where the government directly collected revenue from the ryots or for revenue purposes, the khalsa lands might be leased out to revenue farmers known as mustagirs, the government had practically no direct contact with the ryots in the estates of the zamindars. The zamindari system never attained uniformity throughout the Mughal period. For revenue purposes the government's treatment to the zamindars differed. The Mughal machinery of land-revenue collection was not so complex as has been imagined by many. There were 'amils' or collectors who collected revenue from the zamindars from groups of parganas. In the frontier districts like Purnea, Midnapore and Rungpur, the military commanders and sometimes faujdars were responsible for land-revenue collection from the zamindars. The qanungo's office used to maintain the records of assessment and collection which restrained the zamindars to a considerable extent from oppression and illegal exaction. This system of record-keeping made the revenue collection easier and prevented the zamindars from collecting anything more than the customary rent. The qanungos collected all necessary information from the village patwaris who were regarded as government servants.

It cannot be gainsaid that generally the zamindars were oppressive and imposed various exactions on the ryots. Shore has referred to endless abuses in the estates of the zamindars like "fraudulent concealments, temporary stipulations, conciliatory remissions, alienations, deductions, augmentations, fabrications, mutilation of accounts". But Shore has put the blame for such abuses on the shoulders of the officers of the big zamindars. In his opinion, the smaller zamindars were more efficient and well-informed. In spite of the carelessness of the zamindars regarding the management of their estates, they were popular and influential. As it was observed by an English officer in 1772 that "from a long continuance of the lands in their families. . . they (zamindars) acquired an ascendancy over the minds of the ryots and ingratiated their affections".

*The Part Played by the Zamindars in the History of Bengal*

Contemporary chronicles mostly written under the patronage of Delhi's lords have scarcely taken any account of the national aspirations and achievements in the social field of the local Hindu and Muslim zamindars and officials and their sense of patriotism in the mediæval days. A close scrutiny of the activities of the zamindars will bear ample evidence of their sense of patriotism and chivalry not only in the political field but also in the social and cultural field. In fact, the growth of political and cultural awakening of Bengal in the 19th century had its roots in the preceding centuries. The renaissance of the 19th century Bengal was but the culmination of the past traditions of Bengal.

The Mughal period of Indian history witnessed an exuberance of local patriotism and chivalry in Bengal in a much larger degree than what is seen in the previous epoch. The progress of imperial arms in other parts of India was almost completed within a quarter of a century from the date of Akbar's accession, while they took more than half a century to bring Bengal under effective control. This extraordinary delay in conquering a single province was due to prolonged struggle of the local landlords and chieftains who were never in mood, with a few exceptions, to submit to Mughal imperialism. The Bengali landlords who were commonly known as 'Twelve Bhuiyas' played a glorious role in the history of the province during the first half-century of the Mughal rule. The political pre-eminence, personal valour and material strength and above all the urge for independence which some of the premier landlords of Bengal possessed were certainly highly commendable. Their vigorous opposition to the Mughal imperialists and their efforts in the task of protecting their subjects from the ravages of the imperial troops, certainly speak of their chivalry and benevolent temperament. In an earlier chapter the war of independence of the 'Bhuiyas' of Bengal has already been related.

Besides the noted Bengali chieftains, there were others, who played no less an insignificant role in the history of the province in the succeeding decades.

Raja Sitaram Rai of Bhushna (portion of modern Jessore and Faridpur) played a glorious role in the history of the province in the 18th century. Of the landlords of Bengal who rose up in arms against the rigorous revenue policy and torture of the Mughal officials, Raja Sitaram Rai was the most prominent. Sitaram's

great grandfather Ramdas was a Mughal officer of the crown-land at Rajmahal and he was conferred the title of 'Khas-Biswas'.

Sitaram's grandfather Harishchandra also served at Rajmahal and was honoured with the title of 'Ray-Raja'. Sitaram's father was also honoured with the same distinction and for his loyalty and efficiency, he was transferred to Dacca where he served under the Mughal viceroy Ibrahim Khan (1689-98). It was in Dacca that Sitaram caught the imagination of the viceroy by his dexterity in the use of arms. Sitaram was sent by the viceroy to suppress Kashim Khan, an Afghan rebel. Sitaram's success over the rebel so much pleased the viceroy that he was granted the jagir of Naldi pargana in Bhusna.<sup>1</sup>

Sitaram organised a band of fighters and with their help, he gradually acquired a considerable territory and laid the foundation of a city called Hariharnagar. He adorned that city with a big tank, a number of temples and other buildings. The city attracted traders and merchants from other parts of the country. At that time the entire Naldi pargana was being ravaged and plundered by 'Twelve' robbers of the worst type. Sitaram, after vigorous exertions, succeeded at last in suppressing the robbers and thereby restoring peace and security in the entire region. This success brought much fame to Sitaram and he grew very popular with the people in the locality. He next became anxious to put an end to the ravages committed by the Magh and Feringi free-booters in lower Bengal. With this object in view he secured permission from the then faujdar of Bhusna, Abu Taraf for undertaking pilgrimage to the holy places of northern India. Having obtained that, Sitaram proceeded to Delhi by way of Benaras, Allahabad and Mathura and waited on the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to whom Sitaram related the atrocities of the Magh and Feringi free-booters. The emperor conferred the title of 'Raja' on Sitaram and granted him a jagir in lower Bengal for the purpose of suppressing the foreign free-booters. On his return from Delhi, Sitaram waited on Murshid Kuli Khan at Murshidabad. The latter also granted Sitaram a sanad and permitted him to erect fortresses and maintain an army for the security of lower Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

Raja Sitaram's new capital was Muhammadpur which he adorned with numerous fine buildings and tanks. He organised a new army

<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee, *Murshidabad Katha*, II, pp. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

composed of Hindus and Muslims. He refused to pay revenue to the Nawab of Bengal and "lived in magnificence".<sup>1</sup> He used to behave as an independent prince acknowledging no external authority. His annual revenue was 78 lakhs of rupees. His prosperity and eminence not only excited the jealousy of the neighbouring zamindars but also raised apprehension in the mind of Murshid Kuli Khan. On the repeated complaints of the faujdar of Bhusna, Abu Taraf, to the Nawab, the latter ordered the former and the neighbouring zamindars to seize the person of Raja Sitaram and to send him to Murshidabad. In the war that followed Sitaram won victory and numerous soldiers of the other side were killed. Upon the news of such disaster, Murshid Kuli despatched two contingents under Singharam and Dayaram against Sitaram. On the way the Mughal army met Sitaram and his vanguards. Dayaram made sufficient progress in his bid to seize Sitaram's capital Muhammadpur. The Raja's trusted lieutenant Ramrup succumbed to a conspiracy hatched by Dayaram. This tragic incident damped the spirit of Sitaram and he silently retreated to his capital. Although Sitaram could realise his impending doom, he preferred war to abject surrender. Meanwhile the Mughal army made a great assault on Muhammadpur. The family members of Sitaram were secretly smuggled to Calcutta. Sitaram continued his resistance to the invaders. At last he was captured. He was brought to Murshidabad in a cage in 1714 and after undergoing a few months imprisonment, was executed. According to others, he poisoned himself in order to escape punishment. After the fall of Sitaram, his estates were confiscated and handed over to Ramjiban Rai, the founder of the Nator Raj family.

Raja Sitaram possessed a remarkable character. He was a god-fearing man and benefactor of his subjects. On many occasions, he gave shelter to the oppressed subjects of the Mughals and "made grants of land to them".<sup>2</sup> He erected many temples of which the Dhol Mandir was mostly noted. The temples of Lord Krishna and Balaram were noted for their decorative designs. Sitaram was a great patron of Hindu saints and sanskrit scholars to whom he made large endowments. On the occasion of Dol-yatra and Rath-yatra festivals, he used to distribute a large sum among the poor and destitutes. Muslim chronicles have described him as "a leader of bandits".

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<sup>1</sup> Westland, *Report on the District of Jessore*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

But "the tanks and temples and the ruins at Muhammadpur mark the existence of something more than a mere robber-chief".<sup>1</sup>

Among the zamindars of Bengal who took up arms against Murshid Kuli Khan, Raja Udayanarayan was the most prominent. He was the zamindar of Rajshahi Chakla and the regions along the both banks of the river Padma were within his jurisdiction. He was regular in his payment of revenue to the government and Murshid Kuli Khan was well desposed to him. In course of time Udayanarayan became very powerful. His efficient administration and his loyalty to the Mughal government made him extremely popular with the court of Murshidabad. At one time, in order to quell the internal disturbances in the estates of Udayanarayan, Murshid Kuli Khan sent an army to help the Raja under the zamindar of Kalia and Ghulam Muhammad. Soon the disturbances were quelled and peace came back to the entire region. Meanwhile, Udayanarayan was so much pleased by Ghulam Muhammad's capability that he gave the latter a free hand in the matter of administration. The district of Rajshahi soon grew into prosperity by the joint efforts of Raja Udayanarayan and Ghulam Muhammad. But the growing power of Ghulam Muhammad and Udayanarayan became a source of anxiety to Murshid Kuli Khan who henceforth looked for an opportunity to subdue Raja Udayanarayan more effectively. The desired opportunity soon came. The salary of Udayanarayan's soldiers having fallen in arrears, the Raja allowed them to realise their dues from the subjects. As a result, the soldiers got a free-hand in extorting money from the poor ryots and this gave rise to a very awful situation in the entire district. Upon the appraisal of the situation, Murshid Kuli Khan made no delay in subduing both Ghulam Muhammad and Raja Udayanarayan. He despatched an army under Muhammad Jan to Rajshahi. Udayanarayan was not willing to resist the Mughal force. But being prevailed upon by Ghulam Muhammad, he at last took up arms. In the war that followed, Ghulam Muhammad was shot-dead. But Udayanarayan and his son Sahibram fought bravely and at last fell into the hands of the imperial army. They were brought to Murshidabad as prisoners where they died. Stewart believes that Udayanarayan committed

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



suicide by taking poison.<sup>1</sup> The estate of Udayanarayan was made over to Ramjivan, the brother of Raghunandan.<sup>2</sup>

Udayanarayan was not only a veteran warrior but also a god-fearing man. He built numerous temples and roads throughout his estates. It is said that in his capital at Muhammadpur, the Raja used to distribute food and clothings to the poor and destitutes on every religious festival.<sup>3</sup>

In 1718, Badiul Zaman Khan, the zamindar of Birbhum obtained a sanad from Murshid Kuli Khan for maintaining peace and order in the district of Birbhum. According to the new Badi-ul-Zaman arrangement, Zaman Khan had to pay an annual revenue of Rs. 346,000. He was a humanitarian ruler and used to spend Rs. 140,000 annually on account of religion, education and stipends to poor scholars and saints. He built many mosques and tanks. On two occasions, he fought with the English traders and their agents to protect his peasants and poor merchants.<sup>4</sup>

Badiul Zaman's son Asad Zaman Khan ignored the Nawab of Bengal, Mir Kasim, and even was careless in remitting his revenue to the government. With a view to punish him, Mir Kasim assisted by Major York of Kasimbazar factory, proceeded against Asad Zaman Khan. The latter also took up arms in self-defence. His army consisted of 5,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry. But being defeated, he took shelter in the jungles of Birbhum. Later, Asad Zaman formed an alliance with a Maratha general Sheobhatt and made an effort to recover his estates. The war between Asad Zaman and the court of Murshidabad continued, till 1777 when he died. He was known to be a powerful and generous zamindar.<sup>5</sup>

From a copper-plate inscription prepared by Raja Kali Sankar Ghosal of Bhukailasa, we find the history of Raja Jayanarayan who was born in 1752 and received a sound education. He inherited from his father a vast property which comprised the villages of Govindapur, Garia and Behala. He obtained the title of Maharaja from the emperor of Delhi for his patriotism and munificence. He built a grand temple of Lord Krishna at Benaras in 1790. He enjoyed the

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Calcutta Review*, Vol. LXI, 1873, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee, *Murshidabad Katha*, II, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Gourihar Mitra, *Birbhum Itihas*, I, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-101.

confidence of Warren Hastings and helped the government of the East India Company in their work of survey and settlement in various parts of Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

Rani Bhavani of Natore, whose name has become a by-word for charity and generosity, was the most prominent figure in the history of Bengal in the 18th century among that class of women who could take serious and prominent parts in politics as well as in general administration of the estates entrusted to their care. As a zamindar, she was strong and assertive and was known for her impartial administration of justice. She was highly religious in temperament and patronised Hindu religion by bestowing stipends on the Brahmins and places of worship. For the general well-being of her subjects, she constructed numerous tanks, wells, roads and charitable institutions. Numerous tanks and village markets still bear the name of this pious lady. The Rani took a leading part in protecting the people from the great Bengal famine of 1770 by way of opening free kitchens in different parts of her territory, by purchasing foodgrains at higher prices and selling them at lower prices to the famine-stricken people. Scafton, a contemporary English writer has paid eloquent tribute to the Rani for her charities during that great famine.<sup>2</sup> Westland writes, "this lady's fame spread far and wide and especially it is noted that she was a most pious lady, continually spending her money in the endowment of idols. She established in Benaras alone 380 temples, guest-houses and other religious edifices. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Although it is true that a large number of the Bengali landlords behaved as tyrants and oppressors of their subjects, equally a large number of them played a glorious role in the evolution of Bengal's society, art and literature. In this connection mention may be made of Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia, Raja Rajvallav of Vikrampur, Assadullah Khan of Birbhum and Lakshman Manikya of Bhulua. Raja Krishnachandra appeared in an age when "robbers and bandits overran the country and knavery of all sorts practised in the courts of the Rajas".<sup>4</sup> In such an age Raja Krishnachandra gave ample proof of his patriotism by protecting his subjects from the ravages of the

<sup>1</sup> D. C. Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, p. 782.

<sup>2</sup> Datta, *Alivardi and his Times*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, R. Saha, *Pabna Zelar Itihas*, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Westland, *Report on the District of Jessore*, p. 48.

bandits and tyrant landlords as well as by promoting art and literature. He was the most important man of the period in the Hindu society of Bengal. "His court gathered round it some of the greatest sanskrit scholars. . . He appreciated merit, patronised literature and encouraged art."<sup>1</sup> He was unequal among the zamindars of Bengal in patronising learning and making endowments to the scholars.<sup>2</sup> Among the scholars patronised by the Raja mention may be made of Bharatchandra, Sivaram Vachaspati and Vireswar Nayaya Panchanama. "The poets found the gates of the palace (of the Rajas) open to receive them and cared not if the doors of heaven were shut".<sup>3</sup> At a time when the province was being continuously harassed and plundered by the 'bargis' and the Nawab's officials, Krishnachandra came like a veritable blessing of the Almighty and all through his reign he belaboured for the good of his people. His court was a happy abode of Hinduism and Sanskrit learning.<sup>4</sup> The far-famed clay-models of Krishnanagar and the fine cotton industry of Santipur owe their perfection to the patronage of the Raja.

Raja Rajvallav of Vikrampur, a contemporary of Krishnachandra was another eminent Bengali landlord, who though not himself a great scholar as Krishnachandra was by far the more powerful of the two. "Since the 18th century down to the present days, none so fortunate and powerful has borne in the Vaidya Society as Raja Rajvallav."<sup>5</sup> He was a staunch Hindu and spent huge sums on sacrificial rites. It was under his patronage that the vaidya society grew prosperous and powerful in Bengal. He was also a great reformer. He tried to give protection to Hindu widows against the oppressions of the Hindu society and obtained sanctions from the Hindu pandits from all parts of India in 1756 for the re-marriage of minor Hindu widows. But it failed ultimately as Raja Krishnachandra managed to turn the opinions of the pandits against it.<sup>6</sup> Raja Rajvallav was a great patron of artisans and craftsmen and took personal care for their well-being. He was a great builder too. The city of Rajnagar that he founded far outshone the splendour of the city of Sivanivasa founded by Krishnachandra. His new city "was made a paradise the like of which was not to be found

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<sup>1</sup> D. C. Sen, *History of Bengali Literature and Language*, p. 614.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 616.

<sup>3</sup> B. N. Banerjee, *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha*, I, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> D. C. Sen, *Op.cit.*, p. 617.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Gupta, *Vikrampur Itihas*, p. 146.

in the country at that time outside Murshidabad...the Navaratna with nine spires and the Saptaratna with seven spires, displayed great architectural beauty."<sup>1</sup> There were besides palaces in which the utmost sculptural skill available at the time in India was employed. It is to be admitted that Raja Rajvallav gave a great impetus to the architectural development in Bengal in the mid 18th century. His court was also adorned with gifted poets and scholars. The Fifth Report of the English East India Company refers to Rayararayan and his gifted niece Anandamayee as most renowned sanskrit scholars of the time in the court of Rajvallav.

Besides the illustrious landlords noted above who rejuvenated the life of the Bengalis on a nationalistic line, and thereby have occupied a prominent place in the medieval history of Bengal, there were others who were known for their patriotism and loyalty evoked by their kind and just administration is feelingly described in the Eastern Bengal ballads and in the Dharmamangal.<sup>2</sup> The assimilation and interchange of customs and thoughts between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal became possible to a large measure due to the generosity and liberality of the rulers and administrators of both the communities. This assimilation between the two communities gave birth to nationalistic feelings of the Bengalis. As a matter of fact, in the direction of assimilation and interchange of ideas and customs between the two communities Bengal made a great headway than other regions of India in the same period. During a period of two decades following the death of Murshid Kuli Khan, Bengali Hindus acquired a great ascendancy in military affairs. Although their attempts to regain freedom proved abortive, they remained the mainstay of the Nawab's military force.<sup>3</sup> In this connection the names of Mohanlal, Mir Madan, Jaswant Rao and Sitaram Rai should be mentioned. Their devotion to the Muslim masters and their prowess in the battlefield have been eulogised even by the European writers. Sitaram Rai proved his valour and prowess on several occasions while fighting against the French on the side of the English. Ghulam Husain, the author of the *Mutakherin* has not only referred to Sitaram's military prowess but also to his generosity and charities.<sup>4</sup> "The Hindus displayed a fine genius in the transaction of both civil and military affairs under successive:

<sup>1</sup> J. N. Gupta, *Vikramপুরer Itihas*, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Sen, *Eastern Bengal Pallads*, Vol. I, pt. I, p. LXXV.

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Sen, *Brihat Banga*, p. 955.

<sup>4</sup> Ghulam Husain, *Mutakherin*, II, p. 150.

governments like those of the Turko-Afghans, the Great Mughals, the later Mughals and the British. . . . As a matter of fact, Hindu support was an important factor in his (Alivardi's) career."<sup>1</sup> In the early years of the English rule, when there was wide-spread troubles and chaos in the Midnapore district, the Hindu landlords tried with success to ensure peace and protect the peasants from the ravages and plunders of the 'bargis', 'santals' and 'chuars'.<sup>2</sup> Hence there was no lack of patriotism and chivalry among the Bengali landlords in medieval Bengal.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, *History of Bengal, II*, p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> J. Bose, *Medinipurer Itihas*, p. 496.

## CHAPTER 13

### BENGAL UNDER THE NAWABS

#### I. Land-marks in Bengal's Political History, 1707-1765

Shaista Khan was succeeded by Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur as viceroy of Bengal. He ruled in Bengal for about a year (July 1688-June 1689) when he was removed. About him Francoi's Martin, the Governor of Pondichery writes : "The Mughal has sent orders to Bahadur Khan to quit the viceroyalty of Bengal ; there have been many complaints at the court about the tyrannies and vexations of this noble. It is written (in letters from Bengal) that he has taken from the province during his 18 months charge of it 15 to 20 millions of rupees." It is on record that at the time of his retirement from the province, Bahadur took away with himself 20 million rupees.

Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur's successor was Ibrahim Khan, a son of Ali Mardan Khan of Shah Jahan's reign. Since 1662 Ibrahim Khan had been holding the subahdari of one province after another till he came to Bengal as its viceroy. He was quite advanced in age, very mild in temperament and averse to military activities. He was more interested in commerce and agriculture than war and conquests. The English traders have described him as "the most famously just and good nabob" and according to Muslim chroniclers, "he did not allow even an ant to be oppressed". Ibrahim Khan was a man of peace, a strange figure as he sat buried in his books undisturbed in the midst of the stirring events of his time.

In his eagerness to promote the interests of commerce and industry, Ibrahim Khan came to a settlement with the English whom he allowed to return from Madras and finally to settle at Sutanati in the first year of his viceroyalty (1690) after the emperor Aurangzeb had that year granted a general pardon to the English traders on their making a most humble submissive petition and on their promising to pay rupees 3000 yearly in lieu of all dues. Thus was founded the English settlement of Calcutta destined in time to be the centre of a British Indian empire.

It was during Ibrahim Khan's viceroyalty that the French establishment of Chandernagar was also legally constituted. Although the Dutch tried to obstruct the French establishment, the French agent Deslandes, however, succeeded in winning over the Mughal government

and secured the necessary permission to establish factory and raise building on a promise of paying the emperor rupees 40,000 yearly in lieu of trading freely in the province.

The repercussions of the Mughal disasters in the Deccan were also felt in Bengal as in other parts of the empire. In fact, before the century ended, the decline of the Mughal government had become manifest to all and everywhere the lawless elements raised their heads. Ibrahim Khan's unmartial character and mild administration encouraged a rising which not only broke the Mughal peace in the province but also shook the very foundation of the imperial rule. The rebellion of Shova Singh and Rahim Khan assumed a dangerous proportion and for some time paralysed the Mughal government in Bengal. Ibrahim Khan, immersed in his books, paid little attention to this danger and contended himself with a hasty order to the faujdar of Jessore to punish the rebels. The unchecked success of the rebels thoroughly discredited the Mughal government and greatly swelled the ranks of the rebels. The Mughal faujdars of Hughli and Burdwan instead of facing the rebels bravely, left their charges and sought safety in flight. As a result, within a short time the country on the west bank of the Ganges passed into the hands of the rebels. In this way, Shova Singh built up a state of his own some 180 miles in length along the bank of the Ganges and levied tolls and customs on the river traffic.

The imbecility and supineness of Ibrahim Khan gave the English company at last the chance it had so long awaited.<sup>1</sup> In the face of the rapid advance of the rebels, the English were left to their fate by the Mughal governor and with no hope of help from the Mughal government at Dacca, were forced to take measures for their own defence. Ibrahim Khan responded to their appeal and permitted them to defend themselves. The English at Sutanati, the French at Chandernagar and the Dutch at Chinsura liberally interpreted the viceroy's orders and hastily raised fortifications round their establishments. Thus for the first time the English undertook military works on imperial territory. "It was a far greater step in advance than they themselves at the time were aware. It was an admission that the Mughal power was no longer able to protect them and that in future they must provide for their own defence. The rise of the ramparts of Fort William is a notable landmark in the history of the English in Bengal."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bradley-Birt, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

So careless the viceroy had been to report to the emperor the rising of Shova Singh that the emperor first learnt of the rebellion through a public news-sheet. On account of the utter negligence and inefficiency of Ibrahim Khan, the emperor dismissed him and appointed his grand-son Azim-us-Shan to Bengal in the middle of 1697. The brief rule of Ibrahim Khan, in striking contrast with that of Shaista Khan, was thus over. His son Zabardast Khan was left in command until his successor could reach Bengal, and being, unlike his father, a keen soldier and energetic administrator, he undertook a vigorous campaign against the rebels which he continued with great success until the arrival of Azim-us-Shan.

The Prince arrived at Burdwan in November, 1697 where Zabardast Khan waited on him. Azim-us-Shan's cold reception to Zabardast Khan highly disgusted the latter and he immediately resigned his command and left Bengal in January 1698, Zabardast Khan's retirement greatly weakened the imperial army in Bengal and it encouraged the rebels to renew their raids more vigorously. Rahim Khan, after plundering Nadia and Hughli arrived in the vicinity of Burdwan. Azim-us-Shan tried vainly to pacify the rebel by an assurance of royal favours. This overture made the rebel more bold and he treacherously slew the Prince's chief minister Khwaja Anwar. This roused the Prince at last to action and he detached an army against Rahim Khan. After a hard fighting, the rebel army was overwhelmed and their leader Rahim Khan was killed. This tragic incident completely disorganised the rebel army which quickly melted away. Some of the rebel soldiers joined the imperial army and the rest retired quietly to their abodes.

The consequences of the rebellion of Shova Singh and Rahim Khan were far-reaching. It bears an evidence of administrative and military bankruptcy of the imperial government of Bengal. The helplessness of the Mughal government and the miserable plight of the Mughal army in the face of the rebels shook the very confidence of the people in their government regarding the security of their lives and property. Even the foreign companies trading in Bengal lost faith in the local government and they obtained permission to defend themselves. This was the beginning of Fort William, Fort D. Orleans and Chinsura Ramparts. "All three nations (English, French and Dutch) enlisted temporary bands of Indian soldiers—Rajputs and 'Baksarias', to augment their handful of white soldiers and sailors. Then was



seen a spectacle which no Indian can remember without shame ; the sovereign of the country could not protect his subjects and every Indian of wealth and every government official of the neighbourhood who could, took refuge in these forts of foreigners so to save their lives and honour.”<sup>1</sup> It was really disgraceful on the part of a government worth the name to seek assistance from foreign traders in the initial stage of the rebellion. It is to be noted that the foreign companies never assisted the imperial government with all sincerity. It is true that the Dutch repulsed the rebels at Hughli and the French fired some shots upon the rebels. But they never whole-heartedly supported the government. Under the cloak of neutrality, they refused to take the side of the lawfully constituted government, and thereby they indirectly supported the rebels.

The emperor’s grand-son Azim-us-Shan took charge of the government of Bengal in November 1697. For the next three years, he had a free-hand in the administration of the province and thereafter a new force entered the Bengal administration which ultimately laid the foundation of a new dynasty and thereby gave a new turn in the history of the province. This new force was Murshid Kuli Khan himself with whom the Nawabi-rule in Bengal began.

Born the son of a poor Brahmin, Murshid Kuli was purchased by a Persian named Haji Shafi Isfahani and he was taken to Persia where he received education in the Muhammadan faith. The Persian merchant gave the boy the name of Muhammad Hadi. At the merchant’s death, Muhammad Hadi received his freedom and leaving Persia sought his fortunes in the Deccan where he succeeded in obtaining employment under another Persian Haji Abdullah Khorasani, the diwan of Berar. Even at that early age Muhammad Hadi showed his skill in accounts and all matters of finance. His worth once proved, his promotion was rapid and it was not long before he attracted the attention of Aurangzeb who appointed him to the important office of diwan of Hyderabad and faujdar of Yelkondal in the year 1698 with the title of Kara Talb Khan. Under the emperor’s eyes, he further heightened his reputation as an expert financier and at last, he was appointed diwan of Bengal in 1701. In this province it was Aurangzeb’s practice to keep the military and revenue branches of the government distinct. The Nazim or Viceroy was the representa-

Bengal  
Murshid  
Khan

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Kuli

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 396.

tive of the Crown. His duty was to defend the country from foreign attack and to maintain peace and order. The duties of the diwan were less prominent but scarcely less important. It was his duty to collect the revenue and undertake full financial control of the province.<sup>1</sup> Hitherto, the diwan had been little more than the collector of taxes and treasury officer of the Nazim. Although the diwan was independent of the Nazim, his position was entirely a subordinate one under the former viceroys. The Nazim received his regular salary from the diwan and was not entitled to any further emolument from his office. "These two officers were, however, commanded to consult each other, upon all important affairs and to act in concert upon every public emergency according to the regulations which from time to time were issued." But with the coming of Murshid Kuli Khan, strong in the emperor's favour, the office of diwan grew in dignity and influence.

Although Murshid Kuli Khan was neither subahdar nor deputy subahdar of the province before 1713, he enjoyed enormous power and influence from the outset. Besides, being diwan, he was faujdar of Mukhsudabad, Midnapore, Burdwan and later of Hughli at the same time. Moreover, he was entrusted with the duty of a district magistrate and criminal judge. His enormous power and his influence over the emperor naturally made the old, inefficient and hereditary officials of Bengal very much jealous of him. The officials of this class together with those of lower rank began to obstruct the work of the diwan in every possible way. Even series of complaints were lodged with the emperor against the diwan. But the emperor instead of putting any premium on these complaints, continued to bestow more favours and rewards on the diwan and assured him of his protection against the official clique of Bengal. Against the official clique Murshid Kuli wrote to the emperor thus : "Partners in my work and other selfish people are openly boasting that (in their reports to the imperial court) they would write whatever they thought proper ; and the zaminders on the spreading of this news, are withholding the payment of their due revenues. If the Emperor does not remedy it, lakhs of rupees would again be lost (to the state) . . . I have increased the cultivation of the country and gathered crores of rupees in revenue. But as selfish men are destroying my work, I pray, some other servant may be appointed in my place."<sup>2</sup>

The emperor assured Murshid Kuli of his favour and protection

<sup>1</sup> Bradley-Birt, *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Inayetullah's Akhan*, vide, *Dacca Univ., History of Bengal, II*, p. 401.

In all possible ways in his reply to him thus: "I do not see your point clearly, you are diwan and faujdar with full power and nobody's allegation against you is acceptable to me. Why do you entertain doubts (about my trust in you) prompted by Satan? God guard us from such wickedness! who are your 'partners' and what is their object? Keep in view my favour and instructions, give no place to apprehension in your heart and exert yourself even more earnestly than before in collecting the revenue."<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, the emperor admired Murshid Kuli's ability and assured him again when he wrote to the latter in 1704 thus: "One and the same man is diwan of Bengal and Bihar and nazim and diwan of Orissa with absolute authority. I myself have not the capacity for doing so much work; perhaps only a man chosen by God is gifted with the requisite ability."<sup>2</sup> In fact, devoted to the emperor and extraordinary financial expert as Murshid Kuli was, the emperor had to put absolute trust in him for putting to order the financial anomalies in Bengal and for saving every single pie for the starving imperial family and the imperial army in the Deccan where the old emperor had been engaged in a life and death struggle with the Marathas. The Bengal treasury was practically the last hope of the decaying emperor and his household.<sup>2</sup> Hence the emperor's boundless confidence in his diwan in Bengal is easily understandable. Murshid Kuli was for all practical purposes, given a free-hand in Bengal affairs and his hands were strengthened by appointing his nominees to key posts. Even his relatives were granted mansabs in Bengal.

Till the death of Aurangzeb, Murshid Kuli was left dominant in Bengal and promotions and honours were continually bestowed on him. In 1702 his mansab was raised and he was conferred the title of 'Murshid Kuli Khan'. He also received a special khilat with a kettle-drum and a standard. In 1703, he was appointed deputy subahdar of Orissa where he subsequently became full-fledged subahdar. In 1704, he was appointed diwan of Bihar.

After his arrival at Dacca, Murshid Kuli engaged himself with all earnestness in settling the revenue and financial affairs of Bengal and Orissa. From the outset, he was determined not to allow any interference of the subahdar in the matters exclusively financial. He paid much attention to the improvement of agriculture and the administration of revenue. He appointed honest and intelligent collectors

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

in every pargana and sarkar. By minute attention to details, he effected considerable retrenchments in the revenue department. These reforms (the subject will be discussed in detail in the following chapter) enabled him to remit one crore of rupees annually to the imperial exchequer.

As faujdar of Burdwan, Midnapore, Mukhsudabad and later of Hughli, Murshid Kuli brought much improvement in the general administration of these districts. He also administered Sylhet through his agent and adopted strong military measures for the security of the district against any future trouble from the neighbouring zamindar of Jayantia.

In Orissa as well, Murshid Kuli gave ample proof of his ability as a diwan and governor. In 1703, he was first appointed deputy governor and in the following year a full-fledged governor or subahdar of Orissa. At that time Orissa was in a much disturbed state. Although the Afghan rebel of Orissa, Rahim Khan was finally crushed by Azim-us-Shan, the province still remained a source of trouble to the Mughal government. Murshid Kuli transferred the jagirs of a large number of mansabdars from Bengal to Orissa under the condition that they would devote more attention to cultivation and would maintain peace and order. Murshid Kuli introduced better method of collection of revenue and made it less expensive. Within a few years, there was a considerable increase in the income of the state from Orissa on the score of land-revenue. Murshid Kuli's revenue settlements and other administrative measures in Orissa highly pleased the emperor who increased the 'Swars' by 500 more in the rank of faujdar of Orissa.<sup>1</sup>

Murshid Kuli's works in Bihar were also highly commendable. The constant friction between the people of Bihar and the imperial diwan Abul Qasim put the administration of the province out of gear. There were complaints from both sides to the emperor.<sup>2</sup> To put things in order in Bihar, the emperor asked Murshid Kuli to take charge of the province. Accordingly Murshid Kuli appointed his deputy through whom a series of administrative measures were taken. Very soon, the imperial officials were brought under strict control which lessened to a considerable extent the highhandedness of the officials. They were forbidden to levy any unauthorised taxes as well as to interfere in the lands of the grantees. Murshid Kuli successfully

<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Orissa, II*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ahakam-i-Alamgiri*, p. 1156.

suppressed the insurrection of Dhir, a local landlord of Bihar and dismantled the fortress of the rebels in the neighbourhood of Rehtas. Within a short space of time, the province of Bihar was pacified and an orderly government was established.<sup>1</sup>

By 1704, Murshid Kuli was left with absolute authority as diwan of Bengal and Bihar and subahdar and diwan of Orissa. Thus he came to possess tremendous power and prestige in the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This power and authority together with the emperor's boundless praise and admiration for him, made Murshid Kuli an eye-sore to the old officials and the subahdar of Bengal, Azim-us-Shan. The causes of friction between Azim-us-Shan and Murshid Kuli were numerous.

Murshid Kuli's influence over the emperor was so tremendous that he could appoint any person in the imperial service of the revenue department, whereas Azim-us-Shan, being the subahdar, had to experience enormous difficulties in recommending a person for a post in the imperial service. Sometimes, his recommendations were even turned down by the imperial court. For instance, the subahdar's recommendation for appointing Niamatullah as faujdar of Kuch Bihar was turned down by the emperor and on Murshid Kuli's recommendation Abdur Rahman was appointed to that post. On several occasions Azim-us-Shan was severely reprimanded by the emperor for a simple request. Again in the case of the appointment of the Naib diwan for Bihar, the subahdar's recommendation was not entertained and Murshid Kuli was given a free-hand in that matter. These instances antagonised Azim-us-Shan very much against his all-powerful diwan and frictions between the two began to grow unabated. Murshid Kuli's revenue-reforms and his bid to economise the sources of expenditure became a source of great anxiety for Azim-us-Shan. The latter's primary object in Bengal was to amass wealth for the future war of succession to the imperial throne but in this direction Murshid Kuli proved to be his great obstacle.

Azim-us-Shan, the ablest of the sons of Bahadur Shah I possessed great intelligence but lacked diplomatic tact. He was subahdar of Bengal from 1697 to 1712, but during the last nine years of his subahdarship, he was an absentee and governed the province through agents. He was more interested in making fortunes than in managing the

<sup>1</sup> *Ahakam-c-Alamgiri*, p. 114B, vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 401.

affairs of the subah. This tendency of the subahdar was clearly detected by the English and French traders in Bengal. With a view to amass money, Azim-us-Shan indulged himself in trade monopoly in the most necessities of life. The idea suddenly dawned upon him that he might become the sole merchant of all European and foreign goods brought into Bengal. He therefore formed a company of his own, despatching agents to the ports of un-loading to purchase forcefully the cargoes of all ships that arrived and afterwards to sell them at fancy prices to the retailers. This suicidal form of trade he called 'Sauda-i-Khas' or private trade as distinct from 'Sauda-i-Aam' or public trade. Such illegal practice highly displeased Aurangzeb who reprimanded his grand-son in a letter thus : "My grandson Azim, like me forgetful of God. . . It is not well to oppress the people who have been entrusted to us by the Creator, particularly it is a very wicked act on the part of the sons of kings. Ever bear in your mind the Prophet's precepts on Truth—'Death is an eternal verity, so is Resurrection, so is the bridge across hell, so is the reckoning for your secret acts. . . whence have you learnt this sauda-i-khas which is only another name for pure insanity ? . . Better turn your thoughts away from it."<sup>1</sup>

After such admonition, Azim-us-Shan had to give up his sauda-i-khas. And this being stopped, he could make money only by appropriating the state-revenue and grinding the people. His illegal exactions from the ryots and traders reduced the legitimate income of the state. Moreover, he began to overdraw his sanctioned pay and allowances. These activities of the subahdar soon brought him to a severe clash with the diwan Murshid Kuli Khan. The latter vehemently objected to the practice of the subahdar as he had to save every rupee for remitting to the starving imperial court and the army in the Deccan. Murshid Kuli claimed control over all financial transactions and Azim-us-Shan's desire for enriching himself and his unfounded extravagance thus received a severe check. Even the subahdar's escort of five thousand cavalry had been abolished by Murshid Kuli on the plea that cavalry were of no use in a river-locked district like Dacca. "The peculations of the courtiers were also at an end and Murshid Kuli Khan was soon the most unpopular man in Dacca at the viceregal court."<sup>2</sup> Azim-us-Shan, enraged beyond measure by the strictness of the diwan, finally resorted to violence and intrigue. "It was a dramatic scene", writes Bradley, "that took place in the streets of Dacca in the early days

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley-Birt, *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

of the year 1702, a scene that led to the final abandonment of the city as the Mussalman capital of Bengal.”<sup>1</sup> The viceroy instigated the rowdy cash-paid horsemen (‘naqdi’) of the capital to make a show of demanding their arrears of pay before Murshid Kuli and to kill him in the melee. Accordingly, one morning while Murshid Kuli was proceeding to the palace of the viceroy to pay his formal respects to him, the naqdi captain Abdul Wahid in the crowded streets of the bazar, caught the diwan at a disadvantage. In a narrow lane, Abdul Wahid placed his troops to waylay the diwan. They crowded round him and clamoured for instant payment of their arrears. But Murshid Kuli, well armed as he was, pushed his way through the crowd of the naqdi soldiers and straightway proceeded to the palace of the prince. He openly accused Azim-us-Shan of having instigated this plot against his life. On the face of the viceroy, Murshid Kuli is reported to have said laying his hand upon his dagger : “If you desire my life, have let us try the contest.”<sup>2</sup> At the failure of the plot, Azim-us-Shan became very much upset and apprehended a severe censure from the emperor. He at once climbed down. Murshid Kuli called Abdul Wahid and after inquiring into the alleged arrears of pay, gave him a settlement in full and dismissed him and his troops from the imperial service. Returning home, Murshid Kuli drew up an account of the morning’s proceedings and despatched it to the emperor. Realising that it would no longer be safe for him to stay at Dacca, he chose for his residence the village of Muxadabad and here he transferred his office with the entire staff of the revenue department. The name of the village was later changed with the emperor’s permission to Murshidabad. Meanwhile the emperor in a letter severely reprimanded Azim-us-Shan for his ill-treatment to the diwan and he was ordered to leave Dacca forthwith and to proceed immediately to Bihar. “With him,” writes Bradley, “departed all the public officers—the immense following that gathers round an Eastern Court—and all signs of authority, embarked in a great fleet that covered the river for many miles. Slowly the long procession passed from sight and Dacca was left strangely quiet and deserted.”<sup>3</sup> Azim-us-Shan left his son Farrukh Siyar as his deputy in Bengal with half of his contingent. At first Azim-us-Shan went to Rajmahal but finding the palace built there by Prince Shuja in complete ruins, he proceeded to Patna and made it his official capital. The city was named Azimabad after himself.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

With the departure of Azim-us-Shan, Murshid Kuli's power became almost absolute in the province. Till the retirement of Azim, Murshid

Career of Murshid Kuli after Aurangzeb's death Kuli was a commander of 1500 and neither subahdar nor deputy subahdar of Bengal. Farrukh Siyar was ordered by Aurangzeb to rule the province according to the advice of the diwan. After the accession of

Bahadur Shah I (son of Aurangzeb), Azim-us-Shan was again appointed subahdar of Bengal and Bihar. But he governed these provinces through his sons Farrukh Siyar and Karim-uddin respectively as deputy subahdars. There was a change in the fortune of Murshid Kuli Khan. Azim-us-Shan now got the opportunity of taking revenge on the diwan. Murshid Kuli was replaced as deputy nazim of the province by Farrukh Siyar and as diwan by Ziaullah Khan. He was kept out of Bengal by transferring him as diwan to the Deccan (1708-1709). Upon the murder of Ziaullah Khan in 1710, Murshid Kuli Khan was brought back to Bengal as diwan again. After the accession of Farrukh Siyar to the imperial throne in 1713, the subahdari of Bengal was conferred on the new emperor's infant son Farkhunda Siyar with Murshid Kuli Khan as his deputy. It was in August 1717 that Murshid Kuli Khan was formally appointed full-fledged subahdar of Bengal the position which he continued till his death in 1727. It was during the tenure of his subahdarship that Murshid Kuli introduced far-reaching revenue reforms in Bengal which will be discussed in the next section.

During Murshid Kuli's subahdarship, imperial authority was for the first time successfully extended to Tippera and Kuch Bihar.

Murshid Kuli's relations with Tippera and Kuch Bihar As Salimullah, the author of the *Tarikh-i-Bangala* writes that before Murshid Kuli, the princes of the houses of Tippera, Kuch Bihar and Assam preserved absolute independence, refused obedience to the imperial authority and issued coins in their own names. Murshid Kuli succeeded in realising regular tribute from these ruling houses.

It appears that Mughal aggressions against the kingdom of Tippera had been going for long. From 1611 the accession of Ratna Manikya II, there had been continuing almost incessant feuds and conflicts between the Mughal and the princes of Tippera. Though Tippera was conquered during the reign of Shah Jahan and it was reduced to a tributary vassal, for all practical purposes, the princes of Tippera continued their independent status.<sup>1</sup> Ratna Manikya II of Tippera

<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, VI, p. 359.



was a powerful and vigorous ruler. He defied the authority of the Mughals and in order to strengthen himself against the former, he entered into an alliance with the ruling house of Assam. But very soon the royal house fell into disorder due to a severe internal feud. Murshid Kuli, taking the advantage of this internal feud, despatched an envoy to Tippera court demanding tribute in the form of elephants. But the envoy was followed by an imperial army which made an almost triumphant entry into Tippera. This easy success was due to the treachery of the Tippera king Ratna Manikya's step brother Ghanasyam Thakur. Ratna Manikya was taken by surprise. According to Tippera Buranji, "The Raja (Ratna Manikya) proceeded to the audience-chamber and sat on the throne waiting for the arrival of Ghanasyam. The latter proceeded with his followers to the Raja's palace and planted his standard in front of the throne-room. Ratna Manikya was forcibly removed from the throne and conducted to the inner apartments of the palace." Ratna Manikya was subsequently murdered by Ghanasyam who ascended the throne under the title of Mahendra Manikya, (1712). It is on record that Mahendra Manikya repented for his crime and continued Tippera's friendship with the Ahom Kingdom. Mahendra's successor Dharma Manikya stopped paying tribute to the Mughal government and he was preparing for a rebellion against the imperial authority. Before taking any positive step against the Tippera-Raja, Murshid Kuli died and it was left to his successor Shujauddin Khan to suppress the rebellion of Dharma Manikya.

Like the royal house of Tippera, the royal house of Kuch Bihar also refused to acknowledge Mughal suzerainty. Sometimes before the arrival of Murshid Kuli Khan, a dynastic revolution in Kuch Bihar resulted in the accession of Rupnarayan. Prior to this dynastic revolution, the Kuch Bihar state lost some territories to the Mughals. Rupnarayan made efforts to recover those territories and this brought him into direct clash with the Mughals. Murshid Kuli, in his desire to augment the state-revenue, took the opportunity of Kuch Bihar's hostility against the imperialists. For about six years the hostility between Kuch Bihar and the Mughals continued and at the end of which Rupnarayan conceded some regions to the Mughals. Shortly afterwards Rupnarayan died and his successor Upendra Narayan established cordial relations with Murshid Kuli. Kuch Bihar's independence was virtually recognised by the former. The latter in his bid to annex Kuch Bihar achieved only partial success.

On the death of Murshid Kuli Khan in 1727 without leaving any male issue, the throne of Bengal passed into the hands of his son-in-law Shujauddin Khan. The latter married Murshid Kuli's daughter Zinat-un-nisa and had a son through her named Sarfaraz. During Murshid Kuli's viceroyalty, Shujauddin was appointed the deputy governor of Orissa. The relation between the father-in-law and the son-in-law was never cordial, not only due to their differences in temperament but also to the dissatisfaction of Zinat-un-nisa, a virtuous lady with her husband for his profligacy. For most of the time, Zinat-un-nisa lived with her father at Murshidabad along with her only son Sarfaraz. Towards the end of his life, Murshid Kuli became very much worried about the future of his daughter and hence he did his best to obtain imperial consent to the succession of his grand-son to the government of Bengal and Orissa. But Shujauddin had an eye on the masnad of Bengal. The project of Murshid Kuli Khan having come to the knowledge of Shujauddin, the latter with the advice of two brothers Haji Ahmad and Alivardi Khan, took all possible measures to get timely information of what was happening at Murshidabad and to secure letters-patent from the imperial court in his favour. As soon as it became clearly known to him that Murshid Kuli's days were numbered, Shujauddin at once set out from Cuttack taking with him Alivardi Khan and such a number of friends and troops as he thought sufficient for Murshidabad. He left his another son Muhammad Taqi Khan (born of a wife different from Zinat-un-nisa) as his deputy at Cuttack. On the way, Shujauddin was informed of the death of Murshid Kuli and a few days after, still on his way towards Murshidabad received the patent for which he had applied to the imperial court. He marched expeditiously towards the Bengal capital and arrived there within a few days. He straightway repaired to Chihil Satun (the place of forty pillars raised by Murshid Kuli Khan) and "sending for the waqa-navis or gazetteers and Savanah-navis or crown intelligence, with some other crown-officers and the principal men of the city, he produced his patents, got them read aloud by those two officers and having procured himself to be acknowledged as the lawful subahdar of the two provinces, he took possession of the masnad, sat on it and ordered the imperial music to strike up in rejoicing."<sup>1</sup> His son Sarfaraz Khan, an unsuspecting youngman, was at that time away from the city in the full confidence that he was the

<sup>1</sup> Ghulam Husain, *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirini*, I, p. 278.

designed and undoubted heir of Murshid Kuli in his office and estate and he did not know anything of what was happening within the city of Murshidabad. In fact, Sarfaraz was taken by surprise and he consulted his friends and courtiers who advised him "that as his father had received and proclaimed his patents; had taken possession of the masnad of command as well as of the palace and the city; had been peaceably acknowledged; and was master of the treasury; there remained no other party, but that of submission."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Sarfaraz abandoned the idea of resisting his father and quietly submitted to him and retired to his private residence at Nuktakhali.

Shujauddin re-distributed the government offices among his kinsmen and friends. His chief counsellors were Haji Ahmad and Alivardi Khan. Sarfaraz was retained as the nominal diwan; Muhammad Taqi Khan was appointed deputy governor of Orissa; Murshid Kuli II (Shujauddin's son-in-law) was appointed deputy governor of Jahangirnagar (Dacca); Alam Chand, Shujauddin's former diwan in Orissa was appointed diwan of the Khalsa at Murshidabad. In the management of the subah, Shujauddin was chiefly guided by Haji Ahmad, Alivardi Khan and Jagat Seth Fathe Chand, the noted banker of Murshidabad. "As a matter of fact, the Seths of Murshidabad henceforth played an important part in the history of Bengal and were active participators in the mid-18th century political revolution in the province."<sup>2</sup>

In order to strengthen his position, Shujauddin tried to mitigate the sufferings of the zamindars and the ryots. He adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the zamindars. "His equity and humanity" writes Ghulam Husain, "were no less conspicuous to the zamindars and other landlords of Bengal. These, under Jafar Khan's administration, had been mostly kept in prison and confinement and tormented in such a variety of manners that it would be a piety to spend any paper or ink in describing or mentioning them."<sup>3</sup> He first punished the revenue officers who were proved guilty of oppression and torture on the zamindars and ryots. He next released the zamindars who were found to be guiltless. The rest who had been actually defaulters in the payments of revenue, were forced to execute bonds promising hence-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 423.

<sup>3</sup> *Siyar*, I, p. 279.

forth to be regular in their payments and were subsequently released.

Shujauddin's government did its best to secure peacefully the obedience of the recalcitrant zamindars to the Nawab's government. In 1733 Bihar was added to the subah of Bengal by the Mughal emperor and thus Shujauddin became the subahdar of the three provinces. During the early years of Shujauddin's subahdari, peace reigned supreme in the three provinces. Bihar, which proved to be a very troublesome province, was pacified by the wise administration of Alivardi Khan.

During Shujauddin's subahdari, Murshid Kuli II's deputy (naib) Mir Habib led an incursion into the kingdom of Tippera assisted by the Tippera-Raja's discontented nephew. The imperial army made a surprise attack upon the kingdom. Being overwhelmed at this surprise attack, the Raja of Tippera abandoning his capital took shelter in the neighbouring hills. The capital Chandigarh was thoroughly stormed by the imperial forces and the whole kingdom was brought under direct control. The Raja's nephew was installed in the kingdom, Aqa Sadiq was appointed its faujdar and Mir Habib went back to Orissa with a rich booty. Tippera's name was changed to Raushanabad.<sup>1</sup>

Badi-ul-Zaman, the Afghan zamindar of Birbhum also felt the weight of the Nawab's government. He rose up in arms and stopped payment of his revenue in 1736. From Dacca, Sarfaraz Khan, as ordered by the subahdar, sent an army against the rebel zamindar. Alivardi, the deputy governor of Bihar, also marched at the head of an army against Zaman. Being invaded from two sides, Badi-ul-Zaman readily tendered his submission and accompanied by the imperial forces came to Murshidabad and paid his respect to the Nawab.

Shujauddin died in March 1739. He was succeeded by his son Sarfaraz Khan who assumed the title of Alauddin Haidar Jang. He was thoroughly incapable of ruling a kingdom, being a man of low morale and addicted to the pleasures of the harem. He lacked all the essential qualities needed for the ruler of a state. Sarfaraz, it appears, was never confirmed in office by the Mughal emperor. Bengal, left entirely to itself, quickly became a prey to rival factions. He was not the man that the moment demanded. The administration of the

Sarfaraz Khan,  
1739-40

<sup>1</sup> Bradley, *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

subah fell into disorder and confusion. This state of things encouraged dissension in the rank of the nobles at the provincial court and every body was after increasing his own influence at the cost of the Nawab who ultimately fell a victim to their conspiracy.

Alivardi's rule forms a great land-mark in the political history of Bengal. Like Murshid Kuli Khan, Alivardi Khan also gave Bengal a peace unknown in that age elsewhere in India. During Alivardi's viceroyalty, 1740-56 While Maratha incursions were transforming the face of Malwa, Gujarat, Khandesh and Berar, it was the singular good fortune of Bengal, that it was at that critical juncture under the rule of Alivardi Khan who rose equal to the occasion and thus saved the province from any major catastrophe. Alivardi Khan was not only a great fighter but also an efficient administrator and under whose benevolent rule Bengal enjoyed peace and prosperity.

Alivardi's early name was Mirza Bande or Mirza Muhammad Ali. His grandfather, an Arab by descent, was a foster-brother of Aurangzeb and subsequently raised to the dignity of a Mughal mansabdar. His father Mirza Muhammad was a cup-bearer in the service of Azam Shah, the third son of Aurangzeb. Alivardi's mother was related to Shujauddin Muhammad Khan, son-in-law of Murshid Kuli Khan. Alivardi's family was reduced to great straits after the death of their patron Azam Shah in the battle of Jaju in 1707. Alivardi with a view to try his luck, proceeded towards Bengal in a state of extreme misery and was cordially received by Shujauddin, the deputy governor of Orissa, at Cuttack. Alivardi's brother Haji Ahmad later joined the former at Cuttack. Both these brothers were employed in the service of Shujauddin in Orissa. They exercised a great influence on Shujauddin and contributed much for the success of Shujauddin's administration. They even assisted their master in seizing the masnad of Bengal. Alivardi was gradually raised to higher ranks. In 1728 Shujauddin appointed Alivardi faujdar of Rajmahal where the latter's liberal administration brought peace and prosperity to its people. Haji Ahmad remained at Murshidabad as the principal adviser of the Nawab and his three sons were promoted to higher ranks. Alivardi's fortune took a brilliant turn with his appointment as the deputy governor of Bihar in 1733. The province of Bihar was at that time in a state of great confusion and turmoil. The recalcitrant zamindars stopped paying revenue to the imperial government and Hindu tribes

like the Chakwars and Banjaras proved nuisance to the traders and people alike in certain areas in Bihar. Alivardi thoroughly chastised the unruly elements and reduced the zamindars to obedience. As a result of his successful administration, peace and order came back to the province and the state income from revenue considerably increased. By his meritorious services, Alivardi was able to exercise a tremendous influence on his master Shujau'ddin and earned his favour which he utilised in increasing his own power and influence.

After the death of Shujau'ddin, his son Sarfaraz Khan ascended the throne. Taking advantage of Sarfaraz's weakness, Alivardi and his brother Haji Ahmad hatched a plot to seize the throne. They opened secret negotiation with the principal nobles at the court of Murshidabad. Jagat Seth Fathechand took a leading part in that conspiracy against the Nawab. The time was opportune. Not only the Nawab of Bengal was weak and imbecile, the emperor of Delhi was also in a precarious state after Nadir Shah's invasion. Hence the emperor of Delhi was not at all in a position to check the pretensions of Alivardi Khan and Haji Ahmed. A small circle of self-interested counsellors of the Nawab continually poisoned him against Alivardi Khan and his brother. This gave rise to serious estrangement between the Nawab and Alivardi and his brother. Alivardi grew anxious to strike at the earliest opportunity and hence he left no stone unturned in securing the secret help of some of the noted nobles of the Nawab's court. The leaders of the conspiracy decided to install Alivardi on the throne of Bengal. The Nawab was kept completely in dark by the machinations of Haji Ahmad about the activities of his brother Alivardi Khan. The Nawab Sarfaraz Khan possessed neither far-sight nor capacity to rise up to the occasion and act rightly. "In short, the conspiracy of 1739-40 was the outcome of ambition and ingratitude on the one hand and disgraceful inefficiency on the other." Alivardi prepared his plan very cautiously and strengthened himself by procuring a farman from the emperor of Delhi Muhammad Shah wherein he was granted the government of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in return for which he promised to remit to the imperial court a sum of one crore of rupees as his personal tribute over and above the usual annual tribute amounting to one crore and a few lakhs. In another farman, he was permitted to wrest the throne of Bengal from Sarfaraz Khan.

Having taken all possible precautions, Alivardi marched from

Patna at the head of a large army in March 1740 and arrived at Rajmahal. Sarfaraz Khan till then was completely ignorant of Alivardi's movements as all communications between Bengal and Bihar were cut off by the faujdar of Rajmahal, Ataullah Khan, the son-in-law of Haji Ahmad. With a view to justify his action as well as to secure the position of Haji Ahmad, Alivardi addressed a letter to the Nawab to the following effect. "Since, after the many affronts received by my brother Haji Ahmad, attempts have been made upon the honour and chastity of our family, your servant, in order to save that family from further disgrace, has been obliged to come so far, but with no other sentiments than those of fidelity and submission. Your servant hopes, therefore, that Haji Ahmad shall receive leave to come to me with his family and dependants."<sup>1</sup> Sarfaraz, surprised and confounded by this accusation of Alivardi Khan, vented his resentment in fruitless reproaches. The Nawab severely reprimanded Haji Ahmad mixed with threats. The latter sensible of his danger, assumed a soothing tone of voice and in his endeavours to pacify him, he advanced so far as to promise that the moment he would be in the camp, he would send back Alivardi Khan to his seat of government. The Nawab's advisers were divided in their opinion as to whether Haji Ahmad should be permitted to go to Rajmahal to meet his brother. Sarfaraz, in a state of bewilderment, at last permitted Haji Ahmad to meet Alivardi Khan at Rajmahal and thereby he committed a great blunder. Alivardi won the point he desired first and now he became free to go ahead with his project. In fact, the two brothers were now free to act directly in concert with each other against the Nawab. Haji Ahmad deceived the Nawab by false professions of friendship and fidelity.

When the plot of Alivardi and Haji Ahmad became clear to Sarfaraz, he was thrown into a great dilemma. Amongst his courtiers, those who were in league with the plotters advised the Nawab to accommodate the disputes with Alivardi Khan. While others, attached to the Nawab, advised him to take the field immediately and to chastise the rebel. It was at last resolved to march out and by the exertions of Mardan Ali Khan who was greatly incensed both against Haji Ahmad and Alivardi Khan, the army, with Sarfaraz Khan at its head, marched out. By way of Bahmania and Komrah, Sarfaraz reached Giria, a noted spot

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<sup>1</sup> *Siyar*, I, p. 332.

on the bank Bhagirati. Alivardi Khan, meanwhile, encamped in an area stretching from Aurangabad to Chakra Baliaghata. Each party had numerous forces. Alivardi had 3000 Afghans in his cavalry besides, 10,000 cavalry and his infantry was more powerful than that of Sarfaraz Khan. The latter had 20,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry and 20 pieces of artillery. While the two sides remained encamped facing each other in the field of Giria, messages and messengers continually passed and repassed between the two camps, Sarfaraz Khan offering to receive Alivardi into his favour again and the other answering in the strain he had already done.<sup>1</sup> The negotiations for compromise having failed, Alivardi Khan pushed forward with his army. In April 1740 a hot engagement took place. The Nawab's troops suffered heavy casualties and the Nawab himself fell on the battle-field. Some devoted adherents of Sarfaraz rushed upon Alivardi in a mood to revenge but their efforts were futile. Everyone of Sarfaraz's men exhibited courage and gave proofs of their attachment to the Nawab. Some fell in the field of battle and some despairing of their fortune retreated towards Murshidabad. Victory having now been declared for Alivardi Khan, he immediately despatched his brother Haji Ahmad to Murshidabad with orders to soothe and pacify the inhabitants of the city and to place guards on all the offices of the government and all the apartments of Sarfaraz Khan's palace with strict injunctions to restore peace and order. Two days after the battle, Alivardi Khan entered the city of Murshidabad and after soothing the wounded feelings of the relatives of Sarfaraz Khan with a view to winning them over, ascended the masnad with all formalities. Shortly, Alivardi received from the emperor of Delhi the recognition of his authority as the subahdar of Bengal. For securing this recognition from the emperor, Alivardi had to pay 40 lakhs of rupees in cash along with jewels, ornaments, gold and silver utensils, etc. worth 70 lakhs besides 14 lakhs of rupees to the emperor as peshkash in addition to the annual surplus of the revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa amounting to one crore of rupees.

The Bengal revolution of 1739-40 was a significant event not only in the history of Bengal but also of the Mughal empire. The revolution bears ample evidence of the prevailing vitiated political atmosphere throughout the country which was primarily due to the rapid disintegration of the Mughal empire. Everywhere, adventurers with

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.



inordinate ambition had been playing a prominent role in the political life of the country. Bengal was no exception. Alivardi Khan's treachery towards his master set a bad example in the political history of this province. The means which he used against Sarfaraz Khan was repeated by his brother-in-law Mir Jafar against Sirajuddula and again the same against Mir Jafar by the latter's son-in-law Mir Kasim in the subsequent years. The battle of Plassey "was the reply of historical justice to the battle of Giria." The Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah's approval to Alivardi's usurpation of power in Bengal bears ample testimony to the weakness and imbecility of the imperial power. It was by means of bribes that Alivardi secured the approval of the emperor and the principal courtiers of the Delhi Court. "Thus, when the supreme head of the state and its high executive sold themselves for a mess of pottage, it could not but sink down into moral degradation fringing about its tragic collapse."<sup>1</sup>

The victory at Giria made Alivardi undisputed master of Bengal and Bihar. But Orissa which was a part of the Bengal Subha, still remained in the hands of his adversary, Murshid Kuli II (Rustam Jang), the son-in-law of Nawab Shujauddin Khan. Rustam Jang not only rejected Alivardi's proposal for a compromise but got himself prepared for a trial of strength with Alivardi. Hence war became inevitable between the two sides. Rustam Jang marched out of Cuttack at the head of a large army in December 1740. Being apprised of Rustam Jang's advance, Nawab Alivardi Khan also advanced towards Orissa in January 1741. By forced marches, he reached Midnapore and having won over the local landlords to his side, he proceeded to Jallasore. The zamindars of Orissa were closely attached to their master Rustam Jang and thus made it extremely difficult for Alivardi to gain an easy victory over Rustam Jang. In the plain of Phulwari, the first encounter took place (March 1741). In spite of heavy loss at the initial stage of the war, Rustam Jang and his son-in-law Mirza Baqar fought so bravely that the Nawab's army was put to great straits. In the thick of fighting, some Afghan generals of Rustam Jang deserted their master and joined Alivardi. But this could not damp the spirit of Rustam Jang and Mirza Baqar. After a gallant fighting Rustam Jang left the battle-field and retreated to Massulipatam with his son-in-law and a few faithful servants. It was treachery on the part of Rustam Jang's Afghan generals that turned the fortune in

Alivardi's  
conquest of  
Orissa

<sup>1</sup> K. K. Datta, *Alivardi and his Times*, pp. 41-42.

favour of Alivardi. The Nawab hurriedly advanced to Cuttack and brought the city under his control. After placing his nephew and also son-in-law Sayeed Ahmad (Saulat Jang) in charge of the government of Orissa, Alivardi turned his back towards his capital. But the appointment of Sayeed Ahmad as deputy governor of Orissa was a wrong selection. His incapacibilities soon provoked a wide-spread crisis in Orissa. His licentiousness and extreme greed for money thoroughly disgusted the people of Orissa rich and poor alike. His unpopularity and inefficiency on the one hand and discontentment of the people on the other encouraged Mirza Baqar to reconquer the province. With a band of Maratha troops, Mirza Baqar marched from the Deccan. He entered Cuttack in triumph in August 1741 and brought the capital under his control. Sayeed Ahmad was put under confinement. This turn of events in Orissa dealt a severe blow to the prestige and authority of Alivardi Khan. Hence leaving his eldest nephew and also son-in-law Shahmat Jang in charge of Murshidabad during his absence, Alivardi proceeded to recover Orissa. The determination of the Nawab struck terror into the hearts of Mirza Baqar's officers and soldiers. This compelled Mirza Baqar to leave Orissa for the Deccan again. Thus without much difficulty he recovered Orissa and rescued his nephew Sayeed Ahmad from the hands of the Afghan adherents of Mirza Baqar. Alivardi stayed in Orissa for a few months, restoring order and consolidating his authority there. Having appointed Mukhlis Ali Khan as deputy governor of the province, he came back to his capital. Soon Mukhlis Ali Khan was replaced by Shaikh Masum as deputy governor and Durlabhram, son of Jankiram was appointed revenue-officer in Orissa.

By the end of 1741, Nawab Alivardi Khan succeeded in suppressing all his internal enemies and establishing his authority on a firm footing throughout Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. But he did not get necessary respite for devoting his energies and attention to the internal administration of the provinces on a sound basis. No sooner Orissa was reconquered than he had to face a serious menace from the Marathas which kept him preoccupied for the greater part of his reign. The Maratha invasions in Bengal cannot be dismissed by describing them as plundering raids. These invasions certainly formed a part of their imperialism in Northern India. "The origin of the Maratha invasions of Bengal", writes Dr. K. K. Dutta, "is to be sought in the triumphant Maratha imperialism of the period. The Marathas now sought, as it

Maratha invasions in Bengal, 1741-1751

were, to wreck vengeance on the moribund Mughal Empire which had in its hey day opposed their national aspirations, and made a gigantic bid for supremacy over India."<sup>1</sup> The Marathas carried on almost annual incursions in the provinces of Orissa and Bengal since 1742 which ultimately ceased with the conclusion of a treaty with Nawab Alivardi Khan in 1751.

Raghuji Bhonsle, the independent Maratha chief of Nagpur took the lead in this direction. His ambition of establishing his supremacy at Satara having been frustrated by the superior diplomacy of Baji Rao who had tremendous influence over his master Shahu, Raghuji sought an outlet for political expansion in the subah of Bengal. The prevailing political uncertainties in Bengal offered Raghuji an opportunity for the satisfaction of his political desire. He was emboldened in his project by the support extended to him by the relatives and friends of the late Nawab Sarfaraz Khan who had been driven into exile in the Deccan. These people requested Raghuji to proceed to Bengal and to punish Alivardi Khan whom they regarded as an usurper. The Nizam-ul Mulk Asaf Jah, with a view to protect himself against the possible aggression of the Marathas, instigated Raghuji to proceed to Bengal and collect chouth there.<sup>2</sup>

On his return journey from Cuttack in March 1742, Alivardi was apprised of the incursions of the Marathas under their general Bhaskar Ram into Midnapore. At first the Nawab ignored the report. But soon he was disillusioned when he was informed of the arrival of the Marathas in the neighbourhood of the city of Burdwan. The Nawab made a great haste in advancing against the Marathas and fell upon them at Burdwan. The Marathas created a great terror all around and the Nawab's troops were reduced to great straits. His army was harassed from all sides and his treasures and provisions plundered. At such a critical juncture, the Nawab made overtures for peace but the exorbitant demands of Bhaskar Ram made it impossible. Hence the Nawab resolved to fight. He pacified his Afghan generals and advanced against the Marathas who were encamped at Katwa, and which became the head-quarter of a Maratha army of occupation. Mir Habib who was a right-hand man and deputy of Rustam Jang joined the Marathas and guided their plans and operations. Under the advice of Mir Habib, Bhaskar

Maratha invasion, 1742

<sup>1</sup> Datta, *Op.cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Pandit made a sudden dash on Murshidabad during his absence. The city was thoroughly plundered and its bazar was burnt down. Before Alivardi could come back to save his capital, the raiders retreated to Katwa leaving behind a trail of devastation. Next the Marathas seized the fort of Hughli and thus the districts west of the Ganges passed into their hands. In fact, the country from Rajmahal to Midnapore and Jaleswar came into the possession of the Marathas with Hughli as their headquarters where they installed Shesh Rao as their governor. "All rich and respectable people abandoned their homes and migrated to the eastern side of the Ganges in order to save the honour of their women." (Salimullah).

In March 1743, Raghuji Bhonsle himself arrived at Katwa with Bhaskar Ram. He was determined to collect chouth of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which was promised to Raja Shahu by the Mughal emperor. Raja Shahu granted the chouth of these three provinces to Raghuji Bhonsle. But meanwhile, the emperor appealed to Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao, the personal enemy of Raghuji Bhonsle to proceed to the eastern provinces and to expel Raghuji therefrom by force. Hence almost simultaneously with Raghuji's arrival in Bengal, the Peshwa also entered Bihar. Alivardi came out of his capital to welcome Balaji Baji Rao and he promised to pay the chouth of Bengal to Raja Shahu, besides 22 lakhs of rupees to the Peshwa for the expenses of his army. In return, the Peshwa assured the Nawab that Raghuji would not trouble Bengal. The news of this alliance between the Bengal Nawab and the Peshwa, alarmed Raghuji Bhonsle and he decamped from Katwa to Birbhum. The Peshwa gave a hot chase to Raghuji and drove him into the western hills with heavy loss of men. Having driven out Raghuji from the eastern provinces, the Peshwa went back to Poona.

In March 1744, Bhaskar Ram again marched into Bengal by way of Orissa and Midnapore. This time the Maratha general was more aggressive and indulged in wanton destructions and plunders. The sufferings of the people who fell in his way were immense. Nawab Alivardi was highly bewildered as he was not at all prepared for such an eventuality after the conclusion of his agreement with Balaji Baji Rao. It is to be noted in this connection that meanwhile Raja Shahu amicably settled the affairs between Raghuji Bhonsle and the Peshwa by granting to the former the chouth of Bengal and Orissa and to the

Second Maratha invasion, 1743

Third Maratha invasion, 1744

latter the chouth of Bihar and each was forbidden to interfere in the other's sphere of influence.

Alivardi's position was extremely critical. In spite of his huge presents both to Balaji Baji Rao and the emperor, he not only got an assured protection but also he had to face two Maratha chieftains in his territories. Moreover, repeated invasions of the Marathas and tributes to the emperor and the Peshwa almost drained his treasury. Land revenue collection fell miserably and his troops were in arrears. In a word, the Nawab's position was almost desperate. Hence, instead of facing the enemy on the field, Alivardi resorted to treachery. By a stratagem, he got hold of Bhaskar Ram and treacherously murdered him. Being leaderless, the Maratha troops became bewildered and they hurriedly left Bengal and Orissa.

The tragic fate of Bhaskar Ram and his army made Raghujī wild and he became determined to exact retribution from the Nawab of Bengal. The Afghan rebellion in Bengal gave Raghujī the opportunity to invade the province in 1745 for the fourth time. He demanded 3 crores of rupees as a price for his withdrawal. Happily for the Nawab, the Afghan insurrection subsided by the sudden death of their leader Mustafa Khan. This incident relieved him of an embarrassing situation and emboldened him to assume a strong attitude towards Raghujī. The defiant attitude of Alivardi provoked Raghujī and he entered Burdwan and caused great consternation there. Raghujī next proceeded to Bihar. Alivardi too marched upon Bihar in order to expel the Marathas from Bihar before they could re-enter Bengal. Raghujī continued his march and entered the city of Murshidabad and indulged in wanton destruction of private and public properties. However, upon the Nawab's return to the city, Raghujī left Murshidabad.

The Marathas remained scattered in different parts of Bengal for a few months more till another band of an organised Maratha army invaded Bengal in November 1747 under the command of Janoji, son of Raghujī. Meanwhile, a body of Fifth Maratha invasion, 1747 defeated Afghans joined Janoji which helped the latter in over-running Orissa and invading Bengal. Alivardi defeated the allied forces in a hot encounter near the city of Barh in April 1748 and then reconquered Orissa, which however was reoccupied soon by a mobile Maratha army under Mir Habib.

In this fashion, from 1742 to 1751, the Marathas carried on their

plundering raids into the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which however did not bring any lasting benefit to them. Their primary aim of realising chouth was neither fulfilled nor the wealth they plundered from the provinces compensated their losses in men and money. Their repeated failures at last led them to think of gaining something permanent by coming to an understanding with the Nawab of Bengal. On the other hand, in spite of constant vigilance and terrible loss in men and money the Nawab also could not permanently protect the south-western parts of his nizamat from the ravages of the Marathas which meant a serious loss of revenue. Hence in 1751, negotiations for a treaty began which was finally signed in June 1751 on the following terms—(1) In satisfaction of their demand for chouth (1/4th of the land-revenue), the Nawab agreed to pay them 12 lakhs of rupees annually on condition that the Marathas would never invade the territories of the Nawab. (2) The river Subarnarekha was fixed as the boundary of Bengal subah and the Marathas agreed never to violate this frontier-line. (3) The Nawab agreed to assign the Marathas the revenues of Orissa and a small portion of Midnapore which was to be held by a Maratha army of occupation as security for the payment. (4) The semblance of the Nawab's authority in Orissa was preserved by the appointment of Mir Habib as deputy-governor of the province on the Nawab's behalf.

Since the conclusion of the agreement, the Marathas did not trouble Bengal for some time till 1759 when once more they made unsuccessful raids into Bengal under the leadership of Sheobhat during the Nawabship of Mir Jafar. Nothing was done to arrest Sheobhat's progress till the beginning of January 1760 when Mir Kasim was sent by Mir Jafar against the Marathas. Mir Kasim marched to Burdwan but the uncertainty of the success of the war in Bihar and the contradictory orders from the Nawab, prevented him from making any other use of his army than to protect the revenues of Burdwan from being pillaged by the Marathas. Mir Kasim could not effectively oppose the advance of Sheobhat who entered Midnapore and made himself master of the district. These incursions had created alarm amongst the common people of Bengal on the one hand and encouraged some estranged zamindars, especially the zamindar of Birbhum, to flock to the standard of Sheobhat on the other. At this stage at the Nawab's request, a strong detachment was sent under Major Caillaud at the approach of

Maratha invasion, 1760

which Sheobhat without hazarding an engagement retreated from Bengal. Till 1765, the Marathas made no further attempts to invade Bengal and to collect chouth therefrom.

**Effects of Maratha invasions.** Almost annual incursions of the Marathas into Bengal during the middle of the 18th century touched more or less seriously the social, economic and political life of its inhabitants. The Maratha ravages were not only directed against the principal towns and cities alone. They were carried into the remotest villages of western Bengal where the people suffered more miserably.

Both Indian and English records agree as to the atrocities committed by the Marathas and the miseries suffered by the people. The author of the *Maharasthapurana* says that the Bargis. Social (as the Marathas were commonly called) plundered the fields, fired the villages and carried away the domestic animals. He further says : "The Brahmans and the pandits ran away with their books, the gold-smiths with their weights and measures, the grocers and perfumers and the bell-metal workers after closing their shops, black-smiths and the potters with their implements, the fishermen with their nets and ropes and the conch-sellers with their own articles."<sup>1</sup> The Maratha invasions had repercussions on the moral prestige of the people. Almost annual raids of the Marathas pushed a considerable section of the people of western Bengal to eastern Bengal and to the English settlement in Calcutta for safety. As a result, the tracts bordering Orissa and Western Bengal became desolate and there was a sharp rise in population in eastern Bengal. In course of their annual raids, a section of the Marathas settled down in Bengal permanently as they were primarily attracted to commercial prospects as well as employment projects in the Nawab's government. These Maratha settlers gradually married themselves to Bengali girls, adopted Bengal's culture and customs and ultimately became merged in the Bengal society.

The political effects of Maratha invasions were no less important. The Maratha incursions and their alliance with Mir Habib, a noted Political Afghan general of Orissa, encouraged the Afghan generals and troops of Alivardi Khan to rise up in arms. The junction of these rebel Afghans with the Maratha invaders made the position of the Bengal Nawab extremely critical for some time. The Afghan rebellion in Bengal ultimately

<sup>1</sup> Vide, K. K. Datta, *Alivardi and his Times*, p. 72.

led to the establishment of Maratha predominance in Orissa. Although Orissa was never ceded to the Marathas, unofficially, it was incorporated into the Maratha kingdom of Berar in course of time owing to growing disorder and political uncertainty in Bengal. Moreover, the Maratha invasions led to the growth of the English settlement of Calcutta. During the time of invasions a large number of people from the affected areas took shelter in the English settlement in Calcutta. Numerous merchants and traders also with their wealth and movable properties took shelter in Calcutta. The English, on the other hand, welcomed the refugees and extended their generosity to them. The result was the growth of Calcutta and the growing faith of the local people in the sense of justice and sympathy of the English company.<sup>1</sup>

The economic effects of the Maratha invasions were also grave. They affected different aspects of the economic life of the people. Economic Holwell writes : "Every evil attending a destructive war was felt by Bengal in the most eminent degree, a scarcity of grain in all parts, the wages of labour greatly enhanced, trade, foreign and inland, labouring under every disadvantage and oppressions." The Maratha raiders plundered the bank of Jagat Seth, and the treasury of the Nawab on several occasions, looted the important market places and the common folk had to purchase their security by paying huge amount to the raiders. The ravages led to the scarcity of money in Bengal. The scarcity of money was further increased by the fact that money-lenders and wealthy people of western Bengal "transported their money across the river Ganges for fear of the Marathas". Trade and commerce in western Bengal suffered occasional suspension due to the raids. As a result prices of essential commodities rose high. As Gangaram writers : "The Bargas plundered and murdered all whom they could lay hold of, with the result that no provision could be had, rice, pulses of all sorts, oil, ghee, flour, sugar and salt began to be sold at one seer a rupee." In a word, the Maratha raids almost paralysed the economic life of western Bengal. But at the same time, it is to be noted that the migration of a large number of big and small traders and wealthy people to eastern Bengal, led to economic prosperity of this region.

Another important political event of the reign of Alivardi Khan was the Afghan rebellion which greatly complicated the political situation of the province. This domestic rebellion weakened the

<sup>1</sup> K. K. Datta, *Op.cit.*, pp. 117-118.



military strength of the Nawab's government and encouraged the Marathas to be more aggressive. The Nawab's army was composed of a large section of Afghan soldiers and generals. Their supreme leader was Mustafa Khan who was a close associate of the Nawab. Frustrated in his ambition to be amply rewarded by the Nawab for the meritorious services he had rendered to the Nawab, Mustafa Khan resigned his post and left the capital with his contingent in 1745. He raised the standard of rebellion in Bihar, stormed the fort of Monghyr and made an assault on the city of Patna (March 1745). A large number of Afghan adventurers joined the rebel general. Zainuddin Ahmad Khan, son-in-law of Alivardi bravely defended the city and a hot engagement took place. The death of Mustafa's elephant-driver caused much confusion in the Afghan rank. But Mustafa continued the charge with much vigour. At last Mustafa lost one eye and hence was forced to retreat. Meanwhile, Alivardi joined Zainuddin Ahmad and chased Mustafa out of Bihar. But Mustafa did not abandon the trial. Shortly, he repaired his artillery and made fresh recruits and again marched upon Bihar at the head of a large army. The zamindars of Shahbad joined Mustafa. Zainuddin also marched from Patna and an encounter took place with Mustafa near Jagadispur in June 1745. In the thick of fighting suddenly a musket-ball struck Mustafa's chest and made him senseless. But he soon recovered his senses and advanced against Zainuddin. At last two arrow-shots stopped his life-breath. With the death of the leader, the Afghan rebels soon melted away and they took to flight under the leadership of Mustafa Khan's son Murtaza Khan.

Thus the Afghan rebellion subsided and Zainuddin Ahmad Khan went back to Patna. But the trouble with the Afghans was not really over. Soon they made a junction with Raghujii Bhonsle of Nagpur and instigated him to invade Bihar assuring him of their full support. On the basis of this understanding, the Maratha chief marched upon Bihar in September 1745. Alivardi's Afghan generals like Shamshir Khan and Sardar Khan instead of fighting the enemy on behalf of their master, entered into intrigues with Raghujii for overthrowing Alivardi Khan and sharing the three provinces with the Maratha chief. Their plan was of course frustrated and the Nawab dismissed them from his service.

Soon Zainuddin Ahmad became eager to seize the government of Bengal by forcibly removing his old uncle and father-in-law and with

this object in view, he invited the Afghans of Bihar to his standard. But his hope for Afghan aid was soon belied. At the time of the interview at Patna, the Afghans proved traitors and cut to pieces Zainuddin who was un-armed and undefended. A great confusion followed the murder of Zainuddin for full three years and the people of Patna suffered unspeakable miseries due to Afghan usurpation. Bihar was lost to Alivardi Khan. But the Nawab did not give up the hope of recovering Bihar and suppressing the Afghan rising. Leaving the capital in charge of his eldest nephew and son-in-law Nawazish Muhammad Khan and Ataula Khan, Alivardi left for Patna in February 1748 at the head of a large army. On the way, he appealed to the Peshwa Balaji Rao for assistance by promising him the 'chouth' of Bengal. At Monghyr, Raja Sundar Singh of Tikari joined the Nawab with his contingent. Some other zamindars of Bihar joined the Nawab. On 16 April 1748, the Afghans opposed the Nawab's army at Ranisarai, eight miles west of Barh and a fierce battle ensued. In the thick of fighting every soldier on both sides exhibited equal prowess. The Afghans suffered severe reverses and their three leaders Sardar Khan, Murad Khan and Shamshir Khan were slain. A great confusion and disorder seized the Afghans and being leaderless, they took to flight for safety. The Nawab made a triumphant entry into Patna. He stayed for about six months at Patna for the proper administration of the province. The Nawab's grand-son (son of Zainuddin Ahmad) Sirajuddaulah was appointed the nominal deputy governor of Bihar. But the actual management of administration was entrusted to Raja Jankiram as Sirajuddaulah's deputy.

“The Afghan insurrection of 1748 in Bihar was indeed a calamity of an exceptional kind for Alivardi. It did not merely cause immense personal losses to him in men and money and a tremendous humiliation to his family, but it was also a direct challenge to his rule.” In fact, the Afghan insurrection in Bengal and Bihar was not an isolated event. Their bid for political supremacy in India was an important factor in the history of Northern India during the rest of the 18th century. It drew its inspiration and strength from the exploits of the Afghan adventurers in difficult parts of Northern India and particularly from the exploits of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the ruler of Afghanistan.

**The English ascendancy in Bengal (1756-65) :** The death of Alivardi Khan in 1756 opened a fateful chapter not only in the history of Bengal

but also that of India. It was the singular good fortune of Bengal that in the first half of the 18th century it was ruled by two rulers of exceptional ability, strength of character and long life like Murshid Kuli and Alivardi. These two were strong and competent administrators and for over half a century between them maintained peace, increased the wealth and trade of the province and laid the foundation of an administration which was retained long after the province passed into the hands of the English. Under them Bengal greatly prospered, so much so, that it was regarded as the paradise of India.

Sirajuddaulah,  
Mir Jafar and  
Mir Kasim

Nawab Alivardi Khan was succeeded by his grand-son (daughter Amina's son) Mirza Muhammad, better known as Sirajuddaulah (born in 1729). Alivardi Khan had no sons, but three daughters only. They had been married to the three sons of his brother Haji Ahmad. Sirajuddaulah's father Zainuddin Ahmad had been killed in Bihar in 1748; his two uncles Nawazish Muhammad, governor of Dacca and Sayyed Ahmad, governor of Purnea also died before the death of the Nawab. Thus Sirajuddaulah was left the only claimant to the Nawabship and as far back as 1752 Alivardi publicly declared him his heir. But on the eve of Alivardi's death, Sirajuddaulah's cousin Saukat Jang, the Nawab of Purnea, stood as a great rival of the former. Siraj's another rival was his aunt Ghasiti Begam, the widow of Nawazish Muhammad Khan. The Begam had amassed a vast fortune and her castle the Motijhil was surrounded by a body of armed retainers. Hence she posed a great threat to Siraj. The Begam was scheming to place on the throne Siraj's younger brother Akramuddaulah whom she had adopted. But the boy having died suddenly, Ghasiti Begam turned her eyes on Saukat Jang and invited him to march upon Murshidabad. Thus Siraj had to face a serious challenge from within the royal family. "In fact, the approaching death of Alivardi threatened to provoke a war of succession, which did not turn out so terrible as the war for Aurangzeb's throne 50 years earlier only because the claimants were two worthless youths."<sup>1</sup>

Sirajuddaulah was not the ruler the times needed. He was his grand-father's darling. Neither he was given proper education for his future duties nor he ever learnt to check his passionate impulses. "He was a spoilt child whom the adulation of an old man had made

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<sup>1</sup>. Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 469.

wilful and vain.”<sup>1</sup> Having ascended the throne, Siraj’s first task was to disarm Ghasiti Begam by robbing her of her wealth. Her palace was attacked and was placed in strict confinement. Next Siraj proceeded against Saukat Jang who refused to acknowledge Siraj’s accession to the throne. In the battle of Manihari (16 October 1757), Saukat Jang was defeated and slain. Thus Siraj was finally relieved of the royal claimants to the masnad of Murshidabad.

But in the meantime troubles were brewing in the palace of Murshidabad which ultimately culminated in a conspiracy against Sirajuddaulah. There were two parties involved in that conspiracy—the old Hindu-Moslem nobles of the court represented by Mir Jafar and the English.

The conspiracy  
at Murshidabad

The command over a large army, together with his previous military exploits, had given Mir Jafar a superior position in the subah and enabled him finally to initiate a conspiracy against his master. He first took advantage of the discontent and hatred prevailing amongst the old nobles and courtiers of Murshidabad against the Nawab. He mobilised them to take part in a plot and then invited the English to join it.<sup>2</sup> It would not be out of place to mention that Sirajuddaulah courted the displeasure of the old nobles of the court and treated the old generals of Alivardi Khan with ridicule, so much so that each one of them was shocked to see such a man on the throne. By the severity and harshness of his temper, the Nawab had made many secret enemies both in his court and the army. Persons like Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh and Jagat Seth were turned into sore enemies of the Nawab by his mal-treatment towards them. Mir Jafar made the old nobles understand that they were practically tired of living under such administration, in such a state of general danger and incited them all to get rid of such a government and of such an insensible ruler by removing him from power. In fact, Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh and Jagat Seth and with them Ghasiti Begam suffered personal insult in the hands of the Nawab. On his return to Murshidabad from Calcutta in February 1757, the Nawab found all his old nobles and generals disaffected and beginning to desert his court. Foremost, among them was Mir Jafar who had ceased to attend the ‘darbar’. Next to Mir Jafar in power and influence was Rai Durlabh who likewise began to behave indifferently. The Nawab determined to punish them both. “But he had not the courage”, says

<sup>1</sup> Tarachand, *History of Freedom Movement in India, I*, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Roy, *The Career of Mir Jafar Khan*, pp. 21-22.

Ghulam Husain "necessary for such vigorous action. . . nor did he feel himself vigorous enough to seize his (Mir Jafar's) person by open force."<sup>1</sup> He at times became anxious to reconcile his general and at times became overcome by his anger and resentment. Jagat Seth instigated Mir Jafar to seize the throne by force. But Mir Jafar did not agree as he realised that neither he himself nor the fellow-conspirators were strong enough at that moment to effect it without the help of a third party and so he continued to wait and watch. In such a state of confusion at the court, there came forward a soldier of fortune in the hope of depriving the Nawab of his government. This was Yar Khan Lutf, a general in the Nawab's service. It was Yar Khan Lutf who for the first time invited the English to join the conspiracy. It was only when the English showed their eagerness to oust the Nawab that Mir Jafar agreed to have the masnad for himself.

Meanwhile the relations between the English and Sirajuddaulah were deteriorating from bad to worse. The Nawab had causes of complaints against the English. As Jean Law says that it was ever since the troubles between Sirajuddaulah and his cousin Saukat Jang, the Nawab of Purnea, that the English gave Siraj reason for complaint against them. Siraj came to suspect the English for their secret correspondence with Ghasiti Begam. "It is even said that they had understanding with the Nawab of Purnea."<sup>2</sup> From Ghasiti Begam's affairs arose another cause of Nawab's resentment against the English. This was the Krishna Das affairs. Krishna Das was the son of Raja Raj Ballabh, who was the deputy of Nawazish Muhammad Khan, the Nawab of Dacca. Nawazish's treasures were in the hands of his widow Ghasiti Begam and Raja Raj Ballabh. As soon as Sirajuddaulah ascended the throne, Raj Ballabh transferred the treasures of Dacca to Calcutta under Krishna Das to whom the English gave shelter. This episode gave rise to much suspicion in the mind of the Nawab about the activities of the English. It is on record that Krishna Das secured his admission into Calcutta by bribing principal men of the Fort William. The Nawab demanded of the English Krishna Das's surrender and he sent his envoy Narain Singh to Calcutta with this order. But the Fort William Governor Roger Drake turned the envoy out and refused to comply with the Nawab's order. Even after Ghasiti Begam had been disillusioned and insulted and Saukat

Nawab's complaints against the English

<sup>1</sup> Roy, *The Career of Mir Jafar Khan*, pp. 24-35.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Law Memoir, Hill, *Bengal in 1756-57*, III, pp. 163-64.

Jang subdued by Sirajuddaulah, the English did not surrender Krishna Das to the Nawab and the latter was left with a sense of great annoyance and resentment. Another cause of the Nawab's displeasure with the English was the construction of additions to the fortifications of the Fort William. Some days after Ghasiti Begam's affairs, the Nawab was informed by his spies that the English were fortifying Calcutta and the French Chandernagar. The Nawab ordered the English and the French to demolish their new fortifications immediately. The French complied with the order but the English did not. According to Law, the reply that the English sent to the Nawab was "very offensive". Even an English writer Tooke admits in his Narrative that "The Nawab . . . had great reason to be dissatisfied with the late conduct of the English in general. . . ." The English records bear ample testimony to the fact that "while the Nawab was anxious, in spite of repeated affronts hurled at him, that the English authorities should obey the orders of the government, the Fort William Governor and his close colleagues continuously slighted him, being sure that they would repel him if he ever attacked them."<sup>1</sup>

In the dispute that started between Sirajuddaulah and the English, the former was entirely in the right. The English had not shown the Nawab the usual courtesy by acknowledging his accession to the throne; they had given shelter to a person fleeing from his justice and had expelled from Calcutta his envoy with much affront and over and above they had built additional fortifications at Calcutta and increased the strength of their garrison in flagrant violation of the previous orders of Alivardi Khan. Enraged by these proceedings of the English, Siraj at last hastened to Calcutta, stormed the outposts and took the Fort William by assault. The English governor Drake was however allowed to take shelter at Fulda where he remained undisturbed till reinforcements came from Madras under Clive. Calcutta fell to the Nawab's army in June 1756.

Sirajuddaulah now reached the zenith of his power. His position and power was further strengthened by the arrival of a farman from the Mughal emperor confirming him in the subahdari of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in return for a heavy tribute. Ten days after the fall of Calcutta, the Nawab sent a letter to George Pigot, governor of the English settlement in the South, St. George, "apparently expecting negotiations for reconciliation to be started from that centre of the

<sup>1</sup> Ram Gopal, *How the British Occupied Bengal*, p. 73.

English trade." In fact, the Nawab was hoping against hope for a settlement. But his expectations were dashed to the ground when in December 1756, he was apprised of the arrival of English reinforcements at Fulda for the recovery of Calcutta. Under the command of Clive, an English army marched upon Calcutta. It was a surprise attack. Before the Nawab could personally arrive on the spot, Calcutta fell into the hands of the English (February 1757). The Nawab renewed peace parleys. A treaty of peace was concluded (February 1757) whereby the East India Company's trade rights and factories were restored; the Nawab promised to compensate the losses of the company and its servants and tenants and the English were allowed to fortify Calcutta and coin rupees.

Treaty with  
the English

The last stage of the tragic drama now began. In spite of the recently concluded treaty of peace, the relations between the Nawab and the English began to deteriorate. The English were pressing the Nawab for the fulfilment of the peace-articles and moreover trying to obtain further concessions. The English brought the matter to a crisis by suddenly making an assault on the French settlement in Chandernagar with a view to crush the French power in Bengal so as to leave no other European power in Bengal capable of assisting the Nawab in future. The English aggression on Chandernagar against the Nawab's repeated warnings, roused him to an impending danger. He turned to his old nobles and generals for help. But to his utter dismay he found them all disaffected and beginning to desert his court. In fact, meanwhile the conspiracy initiated by the old nobles against Sirajuddaulah was completed in Murshidabad by William Watts, the chief of the English factory of Kasimbazar. On 5 June 1757, Watts succeeded in securing Mir Jafar's signature to the secret treaty drafted by the English Select Committee at the Fort William. Having completed the plan of operation against the Nawab, the English under Clive marched against the Nawab. The latter also advanced at the head of a large army against the English accompanied by Mir Jafar. At day-break on 23 June, the Nawab's army advancing from the camp towards the mangrove on the plain of Plassey of which the English were already in possession. The first shot was fired by the Nawab's French's general M. Sinfray in the morning and with it the battle of Plassey began. The cannonading from both sides continued for a while in which the English lost 10 Europeans and 20 sepoys. Clive then

Battle of Plassey

ordered his troops to take shelter in the grove. Had Mir Jafar who was on the left wing of the Nawab's army and near to the English joined Mir Madan in cannonading, the victory would have been decided at once for the Nawab. The latter repeatedly summoned Mir Jafar to his side, but he did not move from his position. "All this while," writes Ghulam Husain, "Mir Jafar Khan, the author of all these evils and troubles, contended himself with standing at a distance with the troops under his command, exactly like one who had come only to see the engagement, although his sole aim was to effect Sirajuddaulah's downfall."<sup>1</sup> During the greater part of the day, Mir Jafar remained aloof from the contest and this raised doubts in the mind of Clive who took such a great risky adventure on a mere verbal pledge of Mir Jafar. As a matter of fact, Mir Jafar was himself undecided whether to follow any particular course of action when the result of the fighting was hanging in the balance. He had been watching the turn of the events and so to come over to the winning side.<sup>2</sup> The death of the Nawab's gallant fighter Mir Madan confounded the Nawab and he seems to have lost his presence of mind. In a state of utter perplexity, the Nawab sent for Mir Jafar and implored his help in the humblest strain. Mir Jafar, being now certain of the results in favour of the English, took advantage of the Nawab's critical situation and advised him to recall the troops and suspend the fighting for the night. The unsuspecting and bewildered Nawab relying on the assurance of Mir Jafar recalled his troops from their advance position. As soon as that was done, Mir Jafar secretly informed Clive to make an assault immediately on the Nawab's retiring force and assured the English general of his joining their side at an opportune moment. The inevitable consequence of Mohan Lal's treat now became obvious. It made a profound impression upon the troops who interpreted the return to the camp as defeat and hence began to flee. The Nawab being informed of this, became alarmed by the presence of the enemy in front and the traitors in his camp and lost all firmness of mind. At such a critical moment, the Nawab issued orders to the army to retire from the battle-field and he himself left it hurriedly. Mir Jafar who had been calmly watching the results of his plan, now advanced with his army and joined the English. On the advice of Clive, Mir Jafar hastened with his troops to Murshidabad and arrived there early in the morning of 25 June. Sirajuddaulah who meanwhile left his capital with a

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, Roy, *Op.cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



view to join the French was ultimately seized at Rajmahal, brought back to Murshidabad and subsequently murdered.

With the occupation of Sirajuddaulah's palace by Mir Jafar, the battle of Plassey was consummated. This battle caused the immediate strengthening of British influence both commercially and politically, which within a decade led to the establishment of the British rule in the Gangetic valley, while it sealed the fate of Bengal and of the Muslim power in that valley. Within four decades after the death of Aurangzeb, "sustained economic and cultural development had ceased and political morality degenerated with the times". The country, therefore, needed a new and better influence to save it from further degradation. It needed a ruthless destruction of the foundations of the old order of society, because such a destruction was necessary for a new advance. Although, of course, the establishment of the new order did not bring any immediate betterment in the fortune of the people, yet by the end of the century, the victory at Plassey "introduced into this richest province," observes Malleson rightly, "in a commanding position another foreign race, active, capable and daring, bringing with them new ideas. . .the love of justice, of tolerance, of order, the capacity of enforcing these principles which were necessary to infuse a new and better life into the Hindustan of the last century."<sup>1</sup>

The battle of Plassey though not a great military exploit, was a great event from political point of view. The English for the first time were assigned a tract of land with zamindari rights. It marked the beginning of the British dominion in India. It was a political revolution as well in the sense that the native power in Bengal received a death-blow and the power of the foreigners got a footing. Plassey gave the English the key to the conquest of India. Their command over the financial resources of Bengal, which was the richest province in India in the 18th century, made their task easy against the French and the subsequent conquest of Northern India. "The battle of Plassey gave the English company a sure footing as well as a place of refuge against their worst adversaries, the French and the Marathas. From there they were able to defeat the French and the Marathas and Haidar Ali and his son Tipu Sultan. Duplax failed because he did not possess any advantageous place like the English from where they could get men as well as money to enable them to carry on constant warfare." Plassey completely transformed the position of the English.

<sup>1</sup>Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 74.

in this country. From a body of merchants they henceforth assumed the role of king-makers.

On 24 June Clive in a letter to Mir Jafar congratulated him "on the victory" and said "the victory is yours, not mine." Mir Jafar in his turn "made many expressions of gratitude to the English and assured" them that "he would be faithful to his treaty." On 26 June the ceremony of the new Nawab's installation was gone through. Clive himself carried Mir Jafar by the hand to the 'masnad', made him sit on it and presented him 'nazars'. This was followed by the 'nazars' and homage of the English and all present and a royal salute announced the proclamation to the whole city. Whether the common citizens of the capital were jubilant over this change of government, is doubtful to imagine, but it can be said that to their utter astonishment they saw the throne occupied by a Nawab for the first time in the history of the province under the protection of a foreign race.

The formalities of the crowning ceremony being over Clive called on the Nawab to settle the financial business which gave rise to misunderstanding between the Nawab and the English. The Nawab's pleading of non-availability of sufficient resources to satisfy his obligations to the English instead of satisfying Clive gave rise to suspicion in his mind about the Nawab's sincerity. However Jagat Seth's intervention settled the points as follows : that the English should be paid one half of their demands immediately; two-thirds in cash and one-third in jewels and the other half should be paid within three years. The financial matters being settled to the satisfaction of the English, the next question that came up for discussion was about the confirmation of Mir Jafar's Nawabship by the emperor of Delhi. Clive, as the hero of the day, had to bear this responsibility. On July 30, Clive in his letter to the Mughal emperor pleaded thus : "Sirajuddaulah broke his oath and joined with the enemies of the English to destroy them. . . . He was killed by his servants. . . . By the consent of all the great men of the city, Jaffar Khan Bahadur succeeded him, a man just and merciful as his predecessor was wicked and cruel. He therefore beseeches your Majesty that you will grant him a sanad for the subahship of these three provinces. . . ." <sup>1</sup> At that time bribery could secure any farman from the emperor of Delhi and in fact, it was through bribes and presents to the emperor and his indolent and worthless

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Bengal and Madras Papers*, (Clive's correspondence—No. 203).

nobles at the court that Mir Jafar secured a farman to the effect. Clive took the leading role in securing the position of the new Nawab as well as of the English in Bengal on a firm footing. Not only he got the title of Mir Jafar acknowledged by the Mughal emperor but also reconciled the Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao by agreeing to pay the chauth to the Marathas as Alivardi Khan previously had agreed. Even in the matter of appointments to high government posts in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the new Nawab acted under Clive's advice.

Mir Jafar's reign was not free from internal troubles. He had to face a formidable rising in Midnapore and Bihar. Raja Ram Singh and Raja Ramnarayan raised a standard of rebellion in Midnapore and Patna respectively. These two local zamindars were greatly attached to Sirajuddaulah and hence they refused to acknowledge Mir Jafar's nawabship. One Hazyr Ali declared his independence in Purnea. It was the intervention of Clive that saved the situation and a reconciliation was effected with Raja Ram Singh and Raja Ramnarayan. With the English aid, Hazyr Ali's rebellion was successfully crushed. Clive's handling of the situation which arose with Mir Jafar's accession, gave him an ascending position in Bengal politics. He exacted obedience in the three eastern provinces and created a legendary terror as well. Had he returned to Calcutta immediately after the battle of Plassey, he would have never succeeded in building up a unique position he did for himself and the supremacy would have devolved upon Mir Jafar. For all practical purposes, Clive overshadowed the new Nawab. In fact, "to all feudal nobles, to all important officers, Clive was the real Nawab to whom they paid homage and to whom they looked for protection". At every step the master spirit of Clive prevailed. Clive's interference and intervention in all important domestic issues had undoubtedly been resented by Mir Jafar as a serious encroachment on his rightful authority. But ultimately it proved to be a boon so far as the Nawab was concerned. Bearing in mind the critical situation which confronted the Nawab immediately on his accession, it could be said that without Clive's superior intellect and sincere assistance, he could not have suppressed the formidable rebellions. It was the presence of an English army under Clive which disheartened the malcontents and compelled them to surrender themselves to the Nawab without any bloodshed.<sup>1</sup> As Clive might well observe : "All domestic troubles are now happily ended and the Nawab seemed so well fixed in his government as to be

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<sup>1</sup> Roy, *The Career of Mir Jafar Khan*, pp. 131-138.

able with small degree of prudence to maintain himself quietly."<sup>1</sup>

With the passage of time the Nawab's relations with the English began to deteriorate mainly on two issues, viz. the financial transactions and the Dutch affairs. The strained relations ultimately led to the deposition of Mir Jafar and installation of Mir Kasim. On two occasions, 1757 and 1763, Mir Jafar got the throne of Bengal on a promise of exorbitant privileges both to the company and to the individual English officers in Bengal. At each time the English opened up the glittering prospect of the Bengal 'masnad' to Mir Jafar and thereby squeezed out tremendous material advantages exclusively for their immediate and future interests. On each of these occasions, both public and private treaties were concluded by which the Nawab placed himself under various obligations. Over and above these engagements, demands were put forward from time to time which, in fact, did not fail to create feelings of the mistrust and resentment in the Nawab on the one hand and to confuse his real financial obligations to the English, on the other. It is to be noted that although the Nawab discharged his treaty obligations to the English and remained all along attached to them, he never enjoyed their confidence. From the very beginning of his reign, the council at Calcutta had been continually accusing him of having violated the treaty obligations and at last in 1760 deposed him on the ground of faithlessness and non-payment of his debts. There is, of course, no doubt that Mir Jafar could not discharge his debts in time according to his engagements with the English and sometimes attempted to evade payments, but on the whole, he not only paid off his whole debt (the only balance that remained was a sum of 3 lakhs and 50 thousand rupees) but in addition, granted many other concessions to the company not mentioned in his treaty with the English. At one time the Nawab had to accommodate Clive's demand by assigning the revenues of Burdwan, Nadia and Hughli to the Company. In these districts, the English acted as the Nawab's collectors with the authority to appropriate his share to themselves until the treaty obligations had been fully discharged. In fact, Mir Jafar liberally carried out all the articles of his treaty with the English, transcending the provisions to the advantage of the English and to great disadvantage to the Nawab himself and his government and his subjects. The unending demands of the English on the Nawab

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*

made him so much exhausted and perplexed that he once turned into a 'mendicant' and expressed his desire to renounce the world.

The excessive lust for money made the English wild and the financial bankruptcy of the Nawab encouraged the former more and more to advance their demands. The Nawab was unable to make regular payments to his army and for want of money the Nawab's government was on the point of collapse. The Nawab's helplessness encouraged the

**Mir Jafar's  
deposition**

English to conspire against him and they got sufficient pretext, though largely fanciful, to depose him from the 'masnad'. According to a letter, Hastings, then English Resident at the Nawab's court wrote to Clive, "dissensions had grown between the Nawab and his army, the greater part of which would assuredly quit him as soon as he took field". A section of the Fort William officials began to suspect the Nawab's son Miran of hatching anti-English designs. According to Holwell, "a party was raised at the Durbar, headed by the Nawab's son Miran and Raja Rajballabh who were daily planning schemes to shake off their dependence on the English and continually urging to the Nawab that until this was effected his government was a name only".<sup>1</sup> The Nawab was suspected by the English of being in league with the Dutch with a view to expel the English from Bengal. Some accounts state that about the month of November 1758, a prevailing party at the Nawab's 'darbar' headed by Miran had prejudiced the Nawab so that he came to view with a jealous eye the growing power and influence of the English in the provinces. Certainly, they appear to have succeeded in fomenting the Nawab's anti-English feeling. The Nawab at last began to feel that the power of the English should be restricted or balanced with some other foreign power preferably the Dutch. With this object in view, he began to admit the Dutch into his audience, though he never revealed his inner feelings to them nor granted them any special concession which might provoke the English. The correspondence between the Dutch and the court at Murshidabad and frequent visits of the Dutch officials to the Nawab's court naturally raised suspicion in the mind of the Fort William authorities. So far as the Dutch were concerned, it is to be noted that the commercial concessions granted by the Nawab to the English together with the right given to them "to search all the Dutch vessels coming up Hughli and to prevent the employment of other than the English pilots, had caused great exasperation in the Dutch colony..." Having failed

<sup>1</sup> Vansittart, *Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal*, p. 48.

in their efforts to secure commercial privileges and remedies against the English, the Dutch chief at Chinsura took the initiative in calling for an army from Batavia by successfully convincing the authorities there as to the Nawab's 'supposed' desire for it. The actual arrival of a Dutch fleet in Bengal from Batavia strengthened the suspicion of the English that the Nawab was certainly in a league with the Dutch against them. Contemporary records, however, do not adduce any positive evidence to support the suspicion of the English. When the fighting took place between the two European nations in Bengal, the Nawab did never take the side of the Dutch. Clive in his evidence on this subject observed that "he had no proof for what he was going to offer to the committee". The English Committee at Calcutta never accused Mir Jafar guilty of connivance with the Dutch. And in fact, the Nawab's army cooperated with the English in resisting the Dutch who were ultimately defeated. But the Dutch affair left a trail of bitterness in the English camp which was advanced as a pretext for the deposition of Mir Jafar which followed soon.<sup>1</sup>

The death of Miran came as a great shock to the old Nawab. He seldom attended the 'darbar' to transact business and as a result disorder had crept into the state machinery. Besides, the increase in military expenditure caused serious financial difficulties and the Nawab's carelessness resulted in misappropriations which assumed "huge proportions". The Nawab could neither stem the tide of corruption by holding his evil counsellors in check nor find the means to discharge his obligations to the English as well as to his army. Hence the situation in the capital worsened everyday. This critical state of the Nawab's affairs did not escape the attention of the English officials. Some of them became encouraged at the prospect of a possible change in the government which would facilitate fresh acquisitions of money both for themselves and for the company on the one hand and a stronger hold over the country and its government on the other. "Intoxicated by their late extraordinary success," writes one of them, Debrit, "and overwhelmed by the vast torrent of wealth which increasingly flowed in upon them, the speculations, the projects and the desires of fresh acquisitions, which agitated the minds of these men, knew no bounds."<sup>2</sup> Besides these expectations, there was another such idea in their minds. The English Council at Calcutta all along remained very critical of Mir Jafar and apprehending his secret design to sever

<sup>1</sup> Roy, *Op.cit.*, pp. 184-86.

<sup>2</sup> Debrit, *Transactions in India, etc.*, p. 39.

connections with the English altogether, they formed a party with the Nawab's discontented officials in the 'darbar' in order to keep him in check and even increased the number of their soldiers with a view to facing any such attempt of the Nawab.

These considerations together with the present critical situation of the Nawab opened their eyes to the feasibility of a change of government at Murshidabad by deposing Mir Jafar and either replacing him by a person more suited to themselves or by taking into their own hands the sovereignty of the subah. As early as January 1759, Clive toyed with the idea of assuming the sovereignty of Bengal by deposing Mir Jafar. The idea was later on earnestly taken up by the next governor Holwell and finally carried into execution by the governor Vansittart. Upon the departure of Clive for England in February 1760, Holwell succeeded him temporarily as governor of Fort William. Holwell blackened the character of Mir Jafar in various ways and thereby accused him in the eyes of the council at Calcutta. He missed no opportunity to depose the Nawab and to sell the 'masand' of Bengal to the highest bidder. Mir Kasim, the Nawab's son-in-law, who had been so long watching the strained relations between the Fort William government and the Nawab, now became aware of the former's intentions. Ambitious as he was, he could not miss the chance of replacing his father-in-law and so he secretly instigated Holwell to effect another 'coup' at the capital in his favour and promised him and his associates an ample reward. Before Holwell could execute the plan, Vansittart arrived from Madras to take over the English government at Fort William (27 July 1760).

The new governor was faced with an exhausted English treasury and complete suspension of their trade in Bengal. And further, he became aware that "the man who had been placed on the throne of Bengal by the arms of the British... was surrounded by enemies secret and avowed."<sup>1</sup> So the situation before him was not at all happy.

Holwell, who had already planned to depose Mir Jafar, delivered to Vansittart a 'Memorial' wherein he laid specific charges against the old Nawab of faithlessness and inefficiency. In that 'Memorial', Holwell accused Mir Jafar of treacherous dealing with the Dutch although Major Caillaud pointed out to the new governor that it was never clearly proved and even Clive in his evidence before the Committee

Holwell's  
charges against  
Mir Jafar

<sup>1</sup> Thornhon, *History of British Empire, I*, p. 402.

of the House of Commons said that "he had no proof".<sup>1</sup> Holwell charged the Nawab with secret correspondence against the English with the emperor Shah Alam, although Warren Hastings observed that "document was a forgery". Holwell even accused the Nawab of the murder of persons who were still alive when the Nawab himself was dead. Holwell did his best to incite the new governor against the Nawab and at last advised him to "divest this family (of Mir Jafar) of the government altogether."<sup>2</sup> But Vansittart opposed this suggestion at least at the beginning of his governorship. Nevertheless there is evidence to show that the financial position of the company which was uppermost in the mind of the governor was exploited both by Holwell and his protege, Mir Kasim, and at last compelled him to accept the suggestion as proposed by Holwell.

Mir Kasim was secretly invited by the governor at Calcutta. He agreed to comply with the demands of the English if the latter could undertake to give him the general management of the country and in return Mir Kasim agreed to make such assignments in favour of the company as would be perfectly to their satisfaction. Without loss of time, a secret treaty was accordingly concluded with Mir Kasim on 27 September 1760 whereby he was to be invested with the 'diwani'; he was to exercise all the executive authority but Mir Jafar was to be continued in the Nawabship; all affairs of the government was to be transacted in Mir Jafar's name and a suitable allowance was to be sanctioned to the old Nawab. From the English side, an article was stipulated for the possession of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong as a means of defraying the company's expenses in maintaining the 'masnad' of Bengal. Upon the conclusion of this secret agreement with Mir Kasim, Vansittart with an army proceeded to Murshidabad. In a subsequent interview the governor placing before the old Nawab a series of charges suggested that Mir Kasim should immediately be invested with executive power. Upon the Nawab's reluctance to agree to the governor's proposal, the latter along with Mir Kasim marched towards the palace on 19 October 1760 and besieged it. A letter of the governor was delivered to the Nawab demanding his immediate compliance with what had already been proposed to him. The small force kept by the Nawab to guard his palace became panic-stricken and they left their posts. Terrified at this, the Nawab

<sup>1</sup> *First Report, 1772*, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> *Ben. Sel. Cons.*, 4 August, 1760.



at last ordered the gates to be opened, exclaiming, "that he was betrayed ; that the English were guilty of perjury and breach of faith . . . ." The Nawab thereafter, sent a message to Mir Kasim informing him that he was ready to send him the seals and other ensigns of dignity, provided he (Mir Kasim) would agree to take the whole charge of the government upon himself, to discharge all the arrears due to the troops, to save his life and honour and to grant him a suitable monthly allowance. These conditions having been accepted by Vansittart, Mir Jafar abdicated the throne and Mir Kasim was proclaimed Nawab. On 22 October, Mir Jafar was sent to Calcutta escorted by a company of Europeans and one of sepoys. Mir Jafar dreaded to stay at Murshibabad. He was lodged in a house at Chitpur in Calcutta.

In installing Mir Kasim on the throne of Bengal, the main object of the English governor was to bolster up the finances of the company which had been suffering acutely from the maintenance of armies and expensive fortifications as well as from the diminution of its trade. But within a short space of time Vansittart realised his mistake in entertaining an exaggerated idea of Mir Kasim's importance and his attachment to the English. It is to be admitted that unlike Mir Jafar, Mir Kasim was not only ambitious, but also a man of great personality. Naturally he was not likely to remain under the control of the English like his predecessor. He had closely watched the two changes of government, one under Mir Jafar in 1757 and the other under himself in 1760 and had witnessed the utter subordination and helplessness of his predecessor. Moreover, the above-noted changes had shown him also the inconsistencies of the English with regard to their solemn undertakings to the Nawabs. So from the very beginning of his Nawabi, Mir Kasim was bent on emancipating himself from the influence of the English either by diplomacy or by war.<sup>1</sup> At last, the issue of private inland trade of the English brought about the crisis and the inevitable clash between the Nawab and the English.

With the arrival of Ellis as chief of the English factory at Patna in November 1761, the disputes between Mir Kasim and the company's servants which ultimately culminated in Mir Kasim's downfall took a serious turn. In his desire to have an undisputed sway over Bihar administration, Mir Kasim procured the re-call of Carnac and Coote from Patna. But the arrival of Ellis at Patna as the English

Beginning of  
Mir Kasim's dis-  
putes with the  
English

<sup>1</sup> Roy, *Op.cit.*, pp. 226-27.

chief made Mir Kasim not only nervous but also wild. The Nawab bore a grudge against Ellis. Because the latter did not favour the policy of Vansittart in allowing the Nawab to free himself from the English control ; the Nawab knew that Ellis had been an avowed opponent of the late revolution ; the Nawab was determined to put a stop to the private inland trade of the English officials while Ellis vehemently opposed the efforts of the Nawab to impede this trade and Ellis became very much hateful to the Nawab when it was reported to him that a party of English officials including Ellis were plotting his overthrow. The Nawab's disputes with Ellis brought into prominence the whole question of the private inland trade and the demand of the company's officials for exemption of custom duties. Thus a serious misunderstanding between the Nawab and Ellis grew and a reconciliation between the two became almost impossible.

As the Nawab's complaints against Ellis grew to be numerous and bitter, Vansittart sent Hastings to the Nawab to bring about a reconciliation as well as to allay the Nawab's suspicions of the company's intentions. In fact, the main issue was not the petty quarrels between the Nawab and Ellis but the regulation of private inland trade of the company's officials and the putting of it on a satisfactory basis. On this issue, the Nawab's main grievances were that on flimsy grounds the chiefs of the English factories resorted to coercion against the Nawab's officials ; that the company's 'gomastahs' always resorted to impeding the public business and that merchants without 'dastaks' or pass carried goods on their boats under the cover of English flags with a view to evade the payment of custom duties. Hastings proposed a series of regulations to the Nawab on behalf of the governor thus : that the Nawab's custom officers should insist on being shown a 'dastak' for every English boat ; that a boat with colours but without a 'dastak' should be stopped and that the Nawab's officers should not put any impediments to the company's lawful business. These proposals could not satisfy Mir Kasim. He wanted something more tangible. He was eager for a written agreement from the English Council itself specifying clearly the exact privileges of the company and the extent of his own authority. But as Hastings had no authority to negotiate with him on behalf of the Council, the suggestions of the Nawab could not be accepted by Hastings. Hence Hastings's mission failed, a reconciliation between the Nawab and Ellis remained unaffected and the Nawab's complaints against the private trade of the company's officials grew more vehement.

After removing his seat of government from Murshidabad to Monghyr, Mir Kasim took up the much vexed issue of the private inland trade more seriously and began to complain against the right of the company's officials to trade duty-free. Mir Kasim became determined not to allow the English officials to indulge in private trade any more. He took certain measures in this direction.

Vansittart's mission and agreement with the Nawab

All boats carrying goods with English colours were henceforth ordered to be stopped for the exaction of duties and all sorts of impediments to the company's trade were resorted to ; the number of custom stations was multiplied which not only augmented the royal exchequer but also put an effective impediment to the private trade of the English officials ; and the Nawab vehemently protested against the English merchants trading in certain articles like salt, tobacco, etc. which he referred to as a violation of the company's 'farman'. In fact, the whole of the private trade of the company's servants was suddenly regarded by the Nawab as an "unauthorised and illegal innovation".<sup>1</sup>

The disputes on the issue of the private inland trade of the company's officials grew so serious that a rupture between the Nawab and the company seemed imminent. To avoid such an eventuality, Vansittart decided to call on the Nawab at Monghyr and to settle the dispute to the satisfaction of both the sides. Accordingly, the English governor arrived at Monghyr in November 1762 where he was accorded a grand welcome by the Nawab. The latter renewed his complaints against the alleged ill-treatment he had received from Ellis and others as well as against the abuse of the private trade by the company's servant. The points that the Nawab specially stressed were that the private trade of the company's servants was never covered by the 'farmans' obtained by the company; that this private trade had imposed extra-burden on the administration of the country; that the Nawab's government had suffered a heavy loss in custom duties, that under the cover of English colours merchants other than the English, passed their goods duty-free and that the company's 'gomastahs' and servants oppressed the people. Hence the Nawab demanded the total abolition of the private trade of the company's servants. Vansittart's position was very delicate. Neither he could offend the Nawab by straightway refusing to comply with his demands nor he had the explicit authority to agree to the Nawab's demands

<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee, *Mir Qasim*, p. 149.

without the formal approval of the Council. However, after much deliberations, Vansittart proposed the following regulations: (1) "only the export or import trade of the company shall be duty-free", (2) "for the inland trade, the company's 'dastak' shall not be granted", (3) "Duties should be paid according to the fixed rate on all goods meant for the inland trade", (4) "these goods shall not be detained after the 'dastak' has been examined by the 'Chaukidars'", (5) "if anybody attempts to pass goods without 'dastak' under the care of other boats having a 'dastak', it shall be seized". These proposals were readily accepted by the Nawab. But the governor never anticipated the opposition of his colleagues against these proposals. Further, he was imprudent in divulging his plan to the Nawab before securing the approval of his colleagues in the Council. Hence, the governor's proposals were not likely to be readily acceptable to the Council as well as to the company's servants involved in this illegal trade.

The governor's visit to Monghyr was significant from other point of view. "He could observe at first hand the remarkable change in the whole spirit of the Nawab's government. Mir Qasim was a changed man and he was no longer submissive and conciliatory. His attitude was perceptibly dictatorial and the governor failed to perceive that the Nawab had been aiming at complete independence."<sup>1</sup> The governor came to Monghyr with good intentions but his mission failed to achieve any satisfactory settlement of the issue. By imprudently proposing the regulations he aroused the hostility of his colleagues and thereby hastened the inevitable clash with the Nawab.

Immediately with the departure of the governor from Monghyr began the troubles on the issue of the private inland trade. The Nawab knew it well that the governor's regulations could not be enforced till the final approval of the Council and he knew it well at the same time that the Council would never confirm the same. Calculating on a sharp division in the Council on the issue of the governor's proposed regulation, Mir Kasim went ahead with his plan of putting an end to the private trade of the company's servants. Hence no sooner had Vansittart left Monghyr than Mir Kasim ordered his revenue collectors to enforce the regulations and to punish the defaulters severely. The over-zealous officials began to enforce the regulations strictly and to harass the company's 'gomastahs'. While the Nawab's

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

officials began to abuse their power, the company's officials continued their resistance to the demand of duties as fixed by Vansittart and began to resort to violence whenever necessary. On the one hand, the Nawab's officials insisted on levying duties and punishing the offenders, on the other, the company's servants refused to pay any duty unless instructed to do so by the Council. "The result was a bitter struggle and acts of violence were committed on either side." The hostile majority in the Council rejected wholly the governor's proposed regulations and decided that although the English were allowed by the 'farmans' to trade in the country-produce duty-free, the Nawab was to be allowed a duty of two and a half per cent on salt only and nothing more and that the Nawab's officials should not be allowed any jurisdiction over the English gomasthas.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile upon the appraisal of the Council's rejection of the governor's proposed regulations, the Nawab became very much annoyed and he expressed his resentment to the governor. The Nawab now demanded the complete abolition of the private trade of the company's servants. He became determined not to allow the English officials to indulge in any sort of inland trade on any footing whatsoever. And, in fact, henceforth both sides became adamant in their respective attitude and began to resort to violence. Numerous cases of dispute and conflict between the English officials and those of the Nawab came to pour in from different places. The Nawab's officials were bent on realising duties from the English merchants while the latter took the law into their own hands to prevent their trade from being stopped by the former. To aggravate the situation further, the Nawab at length "executed a veritable coup d'état by announcing the total remission of all duties for two years". "It has often been regarded as a memorable instance of his benevolence towards and sympathy for the Indian merchants." But it should be noted that in abolishing the duties for two years the Nawab was actuated by a desire of crushing the inland trade of the English as he looked upon their trade as a great menace to his government. Doubtless, the Council's refusal to ratify the governor's regulations highly provoked the Nawab and he took up the challenge of the company by abolishing all duties and thereby he expected to force the Council to agree to his demand of duties on the private trade of the company's servants. He also expected that the company to its own interest might also force its officials to pay duties on the private trade.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

It appears from the foregoing passages that under the pretext of the private inland trade, the Nawab was bent upon provoking the company to a war and his attack on the company's sepoys at Tajpur and Gaya and his frequent public declarations to extirpate the English from the three provinces bear ample evidence of this fact. In fact, his real motive was first to defy the power of the English by a show of force and then to assert his independence of the company. The Nawab grew hostile and issued orders to his officers not to allow any Englishman to remain in the country. The majority in the Council now became convinced that the Nawab was seriously bent upon extirpating the English from the country and hence they came to the conclusion that the Nawab should be overthrown. However Vansittart made a last effort to arrive at an amicable settlement with the Nawab as an alternative to war. With this object in view, he sent Amyatta and Hay on a mission to the Nawab to present the Council's demands and to negotiate the terms of fresh agreement in regard to the private inland trade. In a letter addressed to the Nawab, he was told that his refusal to concede to the company's demands would be taken as "a declaration on his side of his intention to come to a rupture".<sup>1</sup> Mir Kasim was not at all willing to welcome the mission and hence it was doomed to failure. And in fact, the mission failed due to Nawab's obstinacy and tactlessness. He treated his guests very harshly. The strained relations which developed did not last long and eventually the English attack upon Patna and subsequent murder of Amyatta by Nawab's officers brought about the final rupture and the war commenced. "Mir Kasim had long prepared for a rupture with the English and he welcomed it in an exultant mood after Ellis's attack on Patna in the hope of vindicating his right to a complete independence of the English."

The murder of Amyatta did not fail to excite a great ferment in Calcutta. After a heated discussion it was decided that war should immediately be declared against Mir Kasim. But a problem soon arose as to what was to be the fate of the 'masnad' of Bengal in the subsequent defeat of the reigning Nawab. Was it to pass over to the company or to some other person? As to the first, the Directors definitely would not have liked at this stage to see the company as sovereign power, because government, in their view, was not the

Restoration of  
Mir Jafar, 1763

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

function of a body of traders. Therefore, it was thought prudent to depose Mir Kasim and simultaneously to appoint somebody else in his place. The Council decided to restore Mir Jafar to the 'masnad'. The majority in the Council believed that Mir Jafar would be the most suitable person to succeed as "from the consideration in which he has for many years been held, must have a number of friends, several of the most considerable persons in the country will flock to his standard". Accordingly a new treaty was drafted to be signed by Mir Jafar, a close study of which shows that the articles were to the distinct advantage of the company and its servants without the slightest consideration either for the restored Nawab or for the interest of the country in general. Mir Jafar was kept in the dark until a deputation of the English officials waited on him at his Chitpur palace and acquainted him with the resolutions of the Council. Though it came to him as a great surprise, he was not the man to miss the opportunity. He agreed to resume the government on the terms of the company. Accordingly the Council issued a proclamation in Mir Jafar's favour.<sup>1</sup>

After the preliminaries of the restoration were over, Nawab Mir Jafar Khan set out to join the English army under Major Adams which was then on its march towards Murshidabad. The war was virtually declared on Mir Kasim. On 24 July 1763 the old Nawab accompanied by the English army entered the city and occupied the palace. To restore peace and order, Major Adams established Mir Jafar on the throne and proclaimed his accession throughout the capital. Having made the necessary preparations for the ensuing campaign, Mir Jafar came out of the city and marched towards Monghyr accompanied by an English army. It is to be noted that throughout the campaigns against Mir Kasim, the old Nawab had played a minor part militarily.

Without going into details, it would suffice to say that the combined strength of the old Nawab and the English resulted in successive victories over Mir Kasim at Katwa, Murshidabad, Giria, Sooty, Udanala and Monghyr. Mir Kasim could nowhere take a firm stand and was driven at last to Patna. Meanwhile Mir Jafar took possession of the fort of Monghyr and having appointed a deputy there, marched with his English allies to Patna, where a severe engagement took place on 6 November. Mir Kasim's army was totally routed and the fort occupied. With the loss of Patna vanished the last hope of Mir Kasim and he took refuge in Oudh and sought the help of Nawab

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<sup>1</sup> Roy, *Op.cit.*, pp. 232-34.

Shujauddaulah. Having settled the affairs at Patna, the old Nawab accompanied by the English generals left Patna in pursuit of Mir Kasim as well to frustrate any combination between Mir Kasim and the Nawab of Oudh. The ambition of the latter was to fish in troubled waters with a view to annex at least a part of Bengal to his dominion. Hence upon Mir Kasim's arrival in Oudh and his subsequent appeal for assistance, Shujauddaulah became more hopeful for his scheme and so he immediately hastened with wandering emperor Shah Alam whose prospect of securing the throne of Delhi was depending on Shujauddaulah in order to get in touch with Mir Kasim. Upon Mir Jafar's representation, the Nawab of Oudh demanded the arrears of the emperor's 'peskash', the wazir's (Shujauddaulah's) 'nazarnah' in ready money. Further he demanded that the English should stand as security for the payment of the emperor's revenues in future for the subahdari 'sanads' to be granted to Mir Jafar. But the English could not comply with the demands and advised Mir Jafar not to make any definite commitment on that score. Besides, the Council thought the Nawab's negotiations with Shujauddaulah independently would make it difficult to get Kasim, Samroo and the English deserters punished or delivered up into their hands. However, upon the receipt of Mir Jafar's agreement to pay to the emperor 28 lakh of rupees annually and a 'peskash' of 5 lakhs, Shujauddaulah prepared the sanads and sent them to Mir Jafar. This confirmation of Mir Jafar in the subahdari was not approved by the English, because the sum mentioned in the agreement seemed to them too much for the Nawab to supply in the present circumstances and besides, nothing was decided by that agreement for the punishment of Mir Kasim and others. The exchange of communications between the old Nawab and the enemy was viewed with great suspicion by the English and they advised Major Carnac that "the Nawab must be ruled by him while the war continued". Besides, the English authorities appointed Batson as their agent at the Nawab's court so that he might acquaint them with every transactions.<sup>1</sup>

Mir Kasim entertained high hopes about the assistance of Shujauddaulah and the titular emperor Shah Alam. He could never imagine the double-dealings of the Nawab of Oudh who kept him as a hostage in order to realise as much as possible from Mir Jafar and the English. Mir Kasim's disillusionment came soon when at Buxar he was treacherously imprisoned at the instance of Shujauddaulah.

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<sup>1</sup> Roy, *Op.cit.*, pp. 252-53.



Even the fugitive Nawab was deprived of almost all that he possessed. The Nawab of Oudh advanced certain reasons for this shameful act, viz. that Mir Kasim failed to provide war contributions; that he failed to send a contingent under Samroo to co-operate with the allied forces; that he was alleged to have secretly murdered Shujauddaulah and that he was alleged to have approached the fugitive emperor Shah Alam for the post of Wazir. But truly speaking Mir Kasim's treasures tempted Shujauddaulah much and he liked to seize it by all means. Moreover, he was anxious to propitiate the English by punishing Mir Kasim.<sup>1</sup> On the eve of the battle of Buxar, Shujauddaulah suddenly released Mir Kasim from confinement and allowed him to escape from the battlefield. Mir Kasim became 'fugitive' again and his downfall was complete. The battle of Buxar was fought on 23 October 1764 and in the thick of the contest in which Shujauddaulah's forces pushed back the enemy on several occasions, success at last greeted the English. "The treacherous activities in the Nawab-wazir's camp could not succeed as well as to enact a Plassey at Baxur." Bihar was cleared of the Oudh invaders and the English demanded of the Nawab-wazir the cession of a part of his dominion in addition to the delivery of Mir Kasim and others as a price of peace-treaty. At the same time, the English Council could not neglect the affairs of the fugitive emperor whom the Council liked to detach from the side of Shujauddaulah. The Council anticipated that the Nawab-wazir "might be driven out of his country through the rebellion of his people or the mutiny of his troops".

Having been thus instructed by the Council, Munro set out with his forces towards Oudh and at Benaras he met the wealthy citizens and merchants of the city. Balwant Singh, the ruler of Benaras acknowledged the English as supplanters of the Nawab of Oudh and agreed to pay them the share of the revenues which he had been paying to the Nawab-wazir. Even Shujauddaulah's minister Beni Bahadur conveyed to Munro his desire of deserting to the English if his master refused to come to terms with the English. The fugitive emperor Shah Alam completely placed himself at the disposal of the English and he agreed to write to different chiefs of Oudh to desert the Nawab-wazir and to secure the loyalty of Beni Bahadur and Balwant Singh.<sup>2</sup> Munro, dwelling on these developments wrote to the Council

War against  
Shujauddaulah  
and English  
victories in Oudh

<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee, *Op.cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> Ram Gopal, *How the British Occupied Bengal*, p. 327.

(22 November 1764) thus : "The king is under our protection, I shall take care to have it under the king's hand that he holds these rights from the English, that he will agree to whatever the Governor and Council of Calcutta will prescribe to him and pay the Hon'ble Company yearly such part of the revenues of the country as the President of Fort William will desire."<sup>1</sup> The parleys between the emperor and the English worried Shujauddaulah and he wrote to Munro (3 January 1765) thus : "If the English will now enter into friendship with me, I will immediately dismiss their enemies and withdraw my protection from them. . . ."<sup>2</sup> However, the English could put no trust on the assurance of Shujauddaulah ; and at last war became inevitable. After suffering repeated reverses at Chunar and Jaunpur, Shujauddaulah at last sued for peace and agreed to surrender his person to the English. The latter accepted the Nawab's proposals and he was re-instated to the Nawabship in Oudh under certain conditions. Oudh was thus turned into a buffer state under British protection against the threatening power of the Marathas. Thus by February 1765, the English obtained almost absolute mastery over the three eastern provinces and Oudh.

Mir Kasim himself desired a rupture with the English and when it actually came, he welcomed it in an exultant mood. But his exultation was short-lived and within a few months he had to leave the country bag and baggage. At the beginning, he enjoyed certain advantages over his enemies. He had a large army at his disposal and it was numerically superior to that of the English. He had enormous treasures at his command. Also he possessed a considerable number of fire-arms. But at last, all his expectations were dashed to the ground. "The failure of Mir Kasim's attempt to overthrow the power of the English was not due to mere chance, but was the result of a multiplicity of circumstances which are too significant to be lost sight of."<sup>3</sup>

Firstly, Mir Kasim was never himself a soldier of first rank. Neither he could personally lead his forces nor inspire it with enthusiasm. He always kept himself at a safe distance from the battle-field and hence he could never control and co-ordinate the actions of his subordinates. Suspicious as he was of the loyalty of his commanders and

<sup>1</sup> *Beng. Secret Consultations, 1763-65, Vol. III, pp. 11-12.*

<sup>2</sup> *Fort William Consultations, 6 December, 1764.*

<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee, *Op.cit.*, p. 240.

officers, he never entrusted the supreme command to any person. And this resulted in ill-planned and ill-directed operations. There was complete lack of unity in the camp of the Nawab.

Secondly, Mir Kasim was never fortunate in having expert and efficient commanders. Except Muhammad Taki Khan, none else could prove his valour and gallantry in the field of action. The generals were mostly involved in their mutual quarrels and thereby ignored their master's interests. This sorry state of affairs was evident in the field of Sooty. "In short, the record of Mir Qasim's military staff during the war was extremely inglorious."<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, although Mir Kasim's army was numerically superior to that of the English, it was inferior to that of the English in discipline and loyalty. The Nawab's army, composed as it was of diverse elements and recruited and trained only recently could be no match for the highly trained and disciplined army of the company. The Nawab's troops were disobedient and insolent and after the battle of Udanala, they were completely demoralised.

Fourthly, the Nawab's personal character was greatly responsible for his downfall. He lacked patience, ripe judgment and vigour. Defeat at each battle made him completely unbalanced and nervous. The defeat at Katwa made him unbalanced and the defeat at Udanala made him completely panick-stricken and hence his command over the army became completely slackened. He became more anxious for his own safety than that of his forces whom he left to their fate at a critical juncture.

Fifthly, the Nawab made a great blunder in entrusting his principal strong-holds like Murshidabad, Dacca, Monghyr and Patna to persons of unreliable character. After a feeble resistance, they took to flight. The fall of these strong-holds in rapid succession into the hands of the English shattered his prestige, demoralised his army and forced him to take refuge in Oudh.

Sixthly, the restoration of Mir Jafar to the 'masnad' of Bengal with the support of the English created a great reaction against Mir Kasim and it was quickly followed by the desertion of the principal nobles and zamindars of the subah to the restored Nawab. The news of the alliance of the English with Mir Jafar weakened Mir Kasim's hold and influence over the people and his own adherents of doubtful loyalty promptly flocked to the standard of Mir Jafar.

The last stage in the drama of the ascendancy of the English in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Bengal now almost reached. It required only the re-appearance of Clive on the scene to legalise the position of the English in Bengal. Mir Jafar in his death-bed had nominated his son Najmuddaulah as his successor and had intimated his desire to the Fort William authorities. But the latter would not allow a fresh opportunity to be missed to gratify themselves. Although Najmuddaulah did not get Nawabship as a prize from the English, the latter sent a mission to Murshidabad to negotiate a fresh treaty with the new Nawab. At the same time the English authorities began to exert their power over the Nawab to the great irritation of the latter. In order to have an exclusive control over the finances of the Nizamat, the English authorities summoned Muhammad Reza Khan, deputy Nawab of Dacca, to Calcutta. Thoroughly unscrupulous and dishonest as he was, Muhammad Reza made no haste in putting himself at the sole disposal of the Fort William authorities. With a view to placate the English, Reza Khan withheld from state treasury large amounts of revenue collections and with this entire sum he came to Calcutta. Najmuddaulah strongly pleaded with the English authorities thus : "The Khan (Reza) had paid only 6 lakhs of rupees and a large sum is still due from him. If he leaves Dacca, the realisation of money will be considerably delayed. The (Nawab) will not be able to discharge his debts to the company." But the English paid no heed to the Nawab's appeal. The English authorities tried to give the Nawab further affront by insisting on the appointment of Rai Durlabh who was a personal enemy of Mir Jafar. Najmuddaulah apprehended that "the employing of such a person will be a means of throwing the affairs of the Nizamat into disorder". However the Fort William authorities at last did not insist on this issue any further.

A fresh treaty and agreement was concluded between the governor and the Council of Fort William and the Nawab Najmuddaulah.

According to its terms, the company agreed to procure for the Nawab the subahdari of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and to support him therein with the company's forces against all his enemies.

On the other hand, the Nawab agreed to bind himself to the faithful performance of the former treaty concluded between his father Mir Jafar and the company; to grant parwanas for the currency of the company's trade; to maintain a person at his court experienced in the court of government to advise him on the administration of the country

and he would be entitled Naib-subah; to entrust the management and collection of revenues to the Naib-subah; to appoint and dismiss the 'mutasaddes' of the revenue department on the advice of the governor and the Council and to ratify and confirm to the English the privileges granted to them by their farmans for carrying on their trade by means of their own 'dastaks' free from all duties, taxes or impositions in all parts of the country excepting in salt on which a duty of 2 per cent was to be levied.

This treaty practically confirmed the private inland trade as practised by the English officials, gave the company a free-hand in the affairs of the Nizamat through the agency of their trusted man Muhammad Reza Khan and thereby the English got a grip on the local government of the subah.

In the summer of 1765 Clive re-appeared on the political scene of Bengal. For some time past, Clive had been toying with the idea of acquiring the sovereignty of Bengal by force. Although Clive's suggestion did not receive much encouragement from the Court of Directors, his compatriots had already begun laying the foundation of the British empire in India in 1757. Upon Clive's arrival in Madras in April 1765 on his way to Bengal, he was very much delighted to know that Mir Jafar was dead and that British influence had largely extended in the eastern provinces. After his arrival in Madras, Clive proposed to the Chairman of the Company thus : "We must indeed become the Nababs ourselves, in fact, if not in name, perhaps totally so without disguise." He further added : "Let us and without delay complete over three European regiments to one thousand each. Such

an army together with five hundred light horse, three or four companies of artillery and the troops of the company will absolutely render us invincible.

Clive's second term

In short, if riches and stability are the objects of the company, that is the method, the only method, we now have for attaining and securing them."<sup>1</sup> But Clive's views were not shared by the Court of Directors who were more concerned with the Company's trade than with acquiring political power in Bengal. With high expectations they sent Clive for the second time to restore the Company's trade and to establish discipline in the Fort William government. On his arrival in Bengal, he came to know of the recent exploitations and illegal gains made by the Company's officials on the occasion of the change in the Nawabship of Bengal. Najmu'daulah also-

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Forrest, *The Life of Lord Clive*, II, p. 257.

made a serious complaint to Clive on this score. The Directors in London specifically instructed Clive that "all persons in the Company's service should execute covenants, restraining them from accepting, directly or indirectly, from the Indian princes, any grant of lands, rents or territorial dominion, or any present whatever, exceeding the value of four thousand rupees, without the consent of the Court of Directors."<sup>1</sup> A few of the Council's members headed by Johnstone criticised strongly the regulations quoted above and charged Clive's conduct in the previous revolution in 1757. In his reply to the charge levelled against him by Johnstone that he took enormous sums from Mir Jafar, Clive explained away his conduct by saying that the "present was given to me in a military capacity only, as a reward for real service tendered to the Nawab at a very dangerous crisis".<sup>2</sup>

However, Clive could not resist the temptation for long to make the Company the sovereign power in Bengal for all practical purposes.

In June 1765, he waited on the Mughal emperor in Allahabad and presented two petitions requesting the former to grant diwani (the right of collecting the revenues) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the Company and to confirm Najmuddaulah in the subahdari of these provinces. In return, the emperor was offered the revenues of the two provinces of Allahabad and Kara (28 lakhs). Further Clive assured the emperor of 26 lakhs of rupees as an imperial revenue annually from Bengal. The fugitive emperor, without a home and resources, readily accepted the proposals "with gratitude". On 12 August 1765, at a formal ceremony, the emperor granted the diwani to the Company and issued a farman accordingly. The whole performance of the imperial court was ludicrous as the emperor without an empire and without adequate force to support himself issued a farman depending on a foreign trading company for its execution and thereby tried to impress upon the people that he really held the sceptre and therefore had the exclusive right to collect the revenues or nominate an agent to do the same on his behalf.

The grant of the diwani brought about a change in the position of the Company vis-a-vis the Nawab's government and hence it required a new arrangement to be concluded with the latter. In fact, the grant of diwani made the position of the Nawab ludicrous like that of the emperor. The

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Auber, *Rise and Progress of the British Power in India*, I, p. 137.

responsibility of the collection of revenue became entrusted to the Company while the Nawab remained the head of the government. This arrangement reduced the Nawab to the position of a titular head and paid servant of the Company. On 30 September 1765, the Nawab was forced to sign an agreement dictated by the Fort William government thus: "The king having been graciously pleased to grant to the company the diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, with the revenues thereof, as a free gift for ever on certain conditions, whereof one is that there shall be a sufficient allowance out of the said revenues for supporting the expenses of the Nizamat; be it known to all whom it may concern that I do now agree to accept of the annual sum of rupees 53,86,131-9 as an adequate allowance for the support of the Nizamat. . . This agreement, I hope will be inviolably observed as long as the English company's factories continue in Bengal."

This is how the English East India Company occupied Bengal and their agreements with the emperor and the Nawab of Bengal laid the foundation of their further expansion.

## II. General and Revenue Administration, 1707-1765

The study of the administrative evolution during the rule of the Nawabs of Bengal is interesting. The pattern of administration during the Nizamat differs from that of the preceding epoch in details as well as in spirit. In the preceding administration epoch the provincial administration was mainly carried on by persons from upper India and they formed the ruling clique in which local genius had no share of any consequence. The administration was run primarily in the interests of the Mughal royal court with little consideration for the people of the land. Each viceroy, when sent to Bengal from the imperial court, used to bring a set of officers and generals who were more concerned for the benefit of their patron than for the general mass, whenever there was change in the leadership of the government in the province, the hierarchy was similarly disturbed and the entire entourage of the viceroy either had to leave the province bag and baggage with their patron or had to live miserably in the province. There was the manifold control exercised by the central authority over the government of this province. The dominant role of the Mughal rule in Bengal till the end of Aurangzeb's reign was an attempt at centralisation. The provincial viceroy was.

put under constant check by a group of officers directly appointed by the imperial court. This resulted in duality in authority over the provincial administration. But the pattern of government under the Nawabs was different from that of the preceding age. Excepting the case of Murshid Kuli Khan who was directly appointed Subahdar of Bengal by the emperor Farrukh Siyar, the other Nawabs had usurped power in Bengal on their own initiative and later got their authority confirmed formally by the reigning emperor of Delhi for the sake of political expediency. The power and position of the Nawabs of Bengal till the downfall of Mir Kasim was quite different from that of the viceroys of the preceding age. Although the Nawabs were fully independent of the emperors of Delhi for all practical purposes, they only had to seek the emperor's confirmation as otherwise they could not expect to have the allegiance of the people of the province concerned. This confirmation, generally speaking, had a traditional influence over the people who were used to obeying the command of a ruler approved by the emperor of Delhi. The Nawabs, after securing the throne had to apply to the emperor backed by huge presents and tributes for confirmation. In fact, the imperial court lost practically all hold over the government of the province since the days of Murshid Kuli Khan.

As stated before, the hopeless state of affairs in Bengal prompted Aurangzeb to send Murshid Kuli Khan to Bengal who had already given proof of his ability as an astute administrator and revenue expert in Hyderabad. Murshid Kuli re-oriented the provincial administration in such a way that it benefited both the government and the people.

It was Akbar who initiated subah system of government in the provinces including Bengal under which each subah was divided into a number of 'sarkars' and each sarkar into a number of paraganas or 'mahals'. The pargana was the lowest administrative unit. The faujdar was at the head of the sarkar administration. In 1722, Murshid Kuli Khan divided Bengal into 13 'chaklas' in place of 34 sarkars of Shuja's settlement. These 'chaklas' were both revenue divisions and administrative units. As Ascoli has said, "the chakla was in existence in Akbar's time but its development as an administrative unit was the work of Murshid Kuli Khan".<sup>1</sup> The 'amil' was the 'chakla' officer performing the duties of magistrate as well.

<sup>1</sup> Ascoli, *Early Revenue History of Bengal*, p. 25.



Dual authority was the principal feature of Mughal administration in Bengal till the arrival of Murshid Kuli Khan. The subahdar was the chief executive entrusted with the duties of "maintaining order, helping the smooth and successful collection of revenues and executing the royal decrees and regulations sent to him" from the imperial court. The provincial 'diwan', thesecond in rank to the subahdar, was directly appointed by the emperor and though nominally under the subahdar, was for all practical purposes independent of the latter. The diwan was primarily entrusted with the duty of regulating and collecting revenue, disbursing the salaries of the officers and soldiers and remitting the revenue to the imperial court. The duty of both the subahdar and the diwan was "to keep strict watch over the other". This arrangement continued till the arrival of Murshid Kuli Khan when we find the violation of this practice of keeping the officers of the subahdar and the diwan strictly separate from each other. Murshid Kuli Khan, while diwan also assumed the faujdari of Murshidabad and Midnapore and latter became subahdar of Orissa in 1703 and deputy subahdar of Bengal in 1707. Finally from 1717 till his death, Murshid Kuli combined in his hands the duties and functions of nazim and diwan.

'Bakshi' was another important post in the provincial government. He was the pay-master of the army and subordinate to the diwan. Since his arrival in Bengal as diwan, Murshid Kuli was the real pay-master of the army. While dealing with the administrative arrangement in the days of Akbar and Jahangir, T. Raychaudhuri points out that "the diwan's extensive powers over the provincial exchequer and the bakshi's control over all matters of military finance, detracted much from the subahdar's autocratic authority in the province". But after the assumption of the two posts of subahdar and diwan by Murshid Kuli Khan the financial control ceased to exist over the subahdar. So there was a deviation from the established practice of the preceding age.

Another post of consequence in the provincial government was that of faujdar. The faujdars were appointed by the emperor and held their posts during the pleasure of the former. During the preceding age no diwan was allowed to hold the post of faujdar. But this practice also underwent a change. Murshid Kuli, while diwan, also held the faujdari of Murshidabad and Midnapore. The primary duties of the faujdar were to maintain peace and order within his jurisdiction and to supervise the collection of revenue of the crown lands under 'chakla'. Here it is to be noted that although the faujdars

were under the direct control of the subahdar, there were faujdars of certain regions who were independent of the subahdar and were only responsible to the emperor. They were the faujdars of Hughli and Purnea. This had given rise to anomaly in the administration. However, upon Murshid Kuli's strong representation to the emperor, the faujdari of Hughli was bestowed on the former.

The next important post in the provincial government was that of kotwal posted in important cities and towns. His primary duty was to maintain peace and order within his jurisdiction and was responsible for theft and robbery committed within his jurisdiction. He was also entrusted with the responsibility of supervising the trade guilds and markets. According to Manucci, the kotwal "is subordinate to the Qazi and receives order from him". For discharging his duties properly, the kotwal used to maintain a body of cavalry and foot soldiers. Also it was his duty to collect various cess and dues from the towns. During the later days of Aurangzeb's reign, the efficiency of the kotwali administration deteriorated considerably and the kotwals turned into oppressors of the people under their jurisdiction. Murshid Kuli made serious efforts to remove the abuses and to set up high standard of morality in the kotwali administration. The kotwals henceforth were to furnish 'muchalka' (an agreement of guarantee) for good behaviour and efficient administration. In fact, Murshid Kuli took great interest in maintaining an orderly administration in the cities and towns.

Like other Mughal subahs, there were four types of news writers who constituted the intelligence department. They were the waqanavis, the swaniah-nigar, the kufia-navis and harkarh. They were all appointed by the imperial court and were independent of the subahdar. Their primary duty was to maintain records of daily incidents and to send them regularly to the emperor. They acted independently of one another. The waqanavis was the official court-recorder while the swaniah-nigar was an official general intelligence given on important cases only. The secret reporters held out a check on the whims and caprices of the subahdar and the diwan. Although at the beginning of his service-career as diwan of Bengal subah, Murshid Kuli was variously maligned by the corrupt news-reporters, he was never in favour of abolishing the institution. Rather he tried to improve the service conditions and allowances of the news-reporters with a view to make the institution more efficient. On various occasions, he requested

emperor Aurangzeb to post sufficient number of news-reporters at all important places in the subah.

Murshid Kuli Khan did not disturb the village administration and left it to the charge of the local landlords. As in preceding age, Murshid Kuli held the zamindars responsible for law and order in the villages under their jurisdiction. Of course, there was faujdar but his jurisdiction was too wide to enable him to look into the problems of the villages. It was only after Raja Sitaram Rai's rebellion that Murshid Kuli became more critical about the activities of the zamindars and began to give more attention to the problems of village administration. The news-reporters were asked to be more active and vigilant and the faujdars were henceforth required to submit occasional reports to the subahdar about the activities of the zamindars. Still, the government of the subahdar could not exert itself on the village administration which continued to be greatly influenced and controlled by the local zamindars.

Murshid Kuli provided against famine and prohibited all monopoly tradings in food-grains. Often he made enquiries about the market prices of grains and inflicted severe punishments on those who charged above market prices. For a steady supply of food-grains with moderate prices in the markets, he always took special care.

Murshid Kuli was a great justicier and ruled the subah with an iron hand. He took much care in appointing judges. During his regime, only the nobility, the learned well versed in the Quran and Muslim jurisprudence and scholars were appointed to the post of the Chief Qazi and the subordinate qazis. The illiterate and men of low birth were never appointed to that high rank. According to the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* normally the qazis were not transferred from one court to another nor any tax levied on them. In fact, they were subordinate to none nor answerable to any for their acts while discharging their duties. The qazis were handsomely paid in order to attract the talents. Two days in a week Murshid Kuli administered justice in person and he was so impartial in his decisions and rigid in the execution thereof that none dared commit oppressions or unlawful things. "The wolf and the lamb lived in harmony together; the hawk and the partridge dwelt in one nest. His decisions were universally famous."<sup>1</sup> No zamindar or 'amil' could with impunity oppress anyone. It is said that the spies of the zamindars were always in search of complainants and whenever they met with any person who

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<sup>1</sup> Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions*, etc. p. 115.

had some grievances, the zamindars tried to give them every satisfaction. But if any well-founded complaints happened to reach the subahdar, severe punishment was inflicted on the offender. Generally Murshid Kuli showed no favour and affection to anyone, "the rich and the poor bearing equal value in his sight".

Murshid Kuli was sensible to the fact that the prosperity of the province depended upon its advantageous commerce and so he gave much encouragement to trade and commerce and showed great indulgence to merchants of every description although generally he was partial to the Persians. His predecessors followed a reactionary policy which, doubtless, hampered steady commercial prosperity of the subah. They almost ruined the internal trade of Bengal by monopolising the trade in the most essential commodities. They used to engross the merchandise either at their places of origin or at the unloading ports, and forced fancy prices on the retail dealers which in consequence raised the prices of the commodities beyond the reach of common people. This evil practice had prevailed in Bengal since the time of Prince Shuja. Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan also followed this practice and Prince Azim-us-Shan carried it to the worst. They all called this practice 'sauda-i-khas' or private trade. Murshid Kuli brought a change in the situation. In his eagerness to improve the material prosperity of Bengal, he issued orders to the faujdars and other civil servants that nothing but the established rate of duties should be exacted from the merchants and under no circumstances to put obstacles to their legitimate trade or to molest them unless they were defaulters. Doubtless, under his patronage Bengal commerce made a great advance and Calcutta, Chinsura and Chandernagar under the English, the Dutch and the French respectively grew into places of great commercial importance.

Murshid Kuli Khan's greatest contributions to the history of Bengal were his revenue reforms. "The land revenue system taken over by the English was in its main features the creation of Murshid Quli Khan and it was continued in a more refined but more rigid form under Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement."<sup>1</sup> Murshid Kuli's Administration is remarkable in the history of Bengal in the sense that it maintained peace internally which in consequence made Bengal materially and culturally prosperous. Murshid Kuli was sent to Bengal with the primary object of reforming

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 397.

the revenue system and here it is that he achieved a grand success.

Since the days of Prince Shuja, the land revenue of Bengal did not show any sign of improvement whereas Bengal was the only source left to aid the emperor Aurangzeb against the Marathas in the south as well as to help the starving imperial court. Before Murshid Kuli's arrival, there was no proper system of land revenue and on this account, the government practically received no fixed and steady income. From the days of the settlement of the Mughals in this province, the country was allotted to the officers, both civil and military as jagirs in lieu of their salary. Even the crown lands were given as jagirs to the imperial officers. There was neither any standard of assessment nor proper machinery for the collection of revenue. The ryots were at the mercy of the tax collectors who left no means to extort money from the peasants which again mostly went into their own pockets. Practically, the government derived no income from this important source. The only source of income to the government was custom duty and hence excessive pressure was exercised by the subahdars and diwans on the European traders.

Murshid Kuli introduced a new settlement based on detailed survey. In Bengal, the state used to get its dues from the old landed proprietors and not from the cultivators. "Like all aristocracies, these men had now fallen into indolence, negligence and improvidence and the state would have no certainty of collection or regularity of income from the land if the old zamindars continued in charge of it."<sup>1</sup> Todar Mal's system of 'zabti', i.e. direct collection of rent from the cultivators, was not suited in the prevailing condition of Bengal. Hence problems which confronted Murshid Kuli upon his arrival were: (1) non-regularity and non-payment of revenues by the older class of the zamindars and (2) insufficiency of crown-lands or khalsa. He undertook the following measures to organise the revenue system on a more solid and scientific basis.

For the purpose of making a fuller investigation into the capacity of the lands, he placed the existing zamindars in a close confinement and put the collection into the hands of ijaradars or contractors by taking suitable bonds from them. This was his 'maljamani' system. These collectors or ijaradars made an actual measurement of all the lands in cultivation as well as of those called 'banjar' (land that had laid fallowed for 5 years and upwards) and obtained information of

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 409.

the ability of every husbandman in every village throughout the province. To those who were unable to purchase the necessary implements of cultivation or grain to sow their land, he advanced takavy loans. Thus cultivation was increased which in turn augmented the revenues. Murshid Kuli prepared an exact 'hustabud' or comparative statement of the collections of former years with the present and conformably thereto, his collectors collected the produce of every harvest immediately from the peasant.<sup>1</sup> "The collections of the year" writes Gladwin, "were always completed by the end of Chaitra (March-April) and he held the Bengal 'Poonyah' (in sanskrit signifies lucky and is particularly applied to the hour fixed upon as lucky for commencing the new year's collections) in the beginning of the month of Baisakh (April-May)."<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that ijaradars or collectors were not necessarily newly recruited—some of the old zamindars were also appointed who satisfied his newly imposed conditions. A few of them, of course, were deprived of their lands, although Murshid Kuli was generous enough to "give them 'nankar' (a subsistence either in money or in land) barely sufficient for a subsistence". In the second or third generation, these ijaradars came to be called zamindars and many of them were dignified with the title of Rajas and Maharajas. In choosing his contractors, Murshid Kuli always gave preference to Hindus, "because", writes Salimullah, "they were most easily compelled by punishment to discover their malpractices and nothing was to be apprehended from their pusillanimity". When he discovered that the collector had wasted the revenues and was unable to make good the deficiency, he compelled the offender, his wife and children to embrace Islam. These were the considerations for his preferring the Hindus in the field of revenue collections. There were, of course, Muslim collectors as well but it was sometimes difficult to recover the embezzled money from them and it is evident in a letter of Murshid Kuli to Aurangzeb wherein he wrote thus: "The mahals which I had entrusted to certain (muslim) officers for meeting the pay of the troops have been usurped (i.e. misappropriated) by them. The local officials of Bengal wish to peculate the money assigned for the payment of those whose salary is due from the state." Thus Murshid Kuli created a new landed aristocracy in Bengal whose position was later confirmed and made hereditary by Cornwallis.

Another change that Murshid Kuli brought about in the revenue

<sup>1</sup> Gladwin, *Op.cit.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

system was the transformation of the officers' jagirs into crown lands directly under the crown collectors. In exchange, he gave the dispossessed officers jagirs in the wild and unsubdued province of Orissa. "He represented the advantage that would accrue to the crown by transferring the jagirs of the mansabdars from the subah to Orissa where the lands were of less value and the collections made with greater expense and difficulty." The emperor having approved of this proposal, Murshid Kuli immediately resumed all the jagirs in Bengal excepting what were properly annexed to the Nizamat and the diwani. This measure considerably increased the state income on the head of land revenue. This policy not only bore fruit economically but had also political bearings. The evils of assignments of land revenue to government officials were realised as early as in the time of Sultan Allauddin Khalji. According to Afif's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, Allauddin discouraged assignments of villages on the ground that they constituted a political danger as the assignees in the rural areas creating their sphere of influence always posed a great challenge to the imperial authority. Surprisingly enough, the practice which was condemned by Alauddin Khalji continued in operation through the ages till the close of Aurangzeb's reign. Murshid Kuli's policy of farming out the khalsa lands for a fixed sum to be paid annually should be explained in the context of the evil nature of large assignments. Here it is to be noted that the system of assignments was fast losing popularity amongst the higher officials at the beginning of the 18th century. They preferred payments in cash to that in assignments.

For the purpose of revenue settlement, Murshid Kuli divided the whole of Bengal into 13 'chaklas' and thereby abolishing the 34 sarkars under Todar Mal's system. Each chakla was placed in charge of an 'amil' who was ultimately responsible for the collection of revenue of the entire 'chakla' under his charge. Twenty-five areas were kept reserved as khalsa farmed out to ijaradars or contractors. Murshid Kuli increased the revenue paying lands, i.e. khalsa by Rs. 11,72,279 and for that reason he formed 350 parganas out of 1,350 parganas of the days of Prince Shuja.

Murshid Kuli created a new administrative division replacing the larger number of sarkars by a lesser number of chaklas. The newly created 13 chaklas comprised a large number of parganas. The revenue of these chaklas was fixed at Rs. 1,42,88,126. The 'chaklas' served both financial and administrative purposes. Each chakla was put in charge of an 'amil' whose duty was like that of a faujdar.

Murshid Kuli augmented the revenue of Bengal not only by foregoing methods but also by bringing larger areas under imperial authority. For instance, Mymensingh and Alapsingh in the north-east and Jessore-Khulna in the extreme south, were made regularly revenue-paying areas under the crown. Also the ruling houses of Kuch Bihar and Tippera were made to pay tribute to the Bengal subahdar.

Murshid Kuli was not satisfied with merely reforming the system but also took the collection entirely into his own hands. He owed his success in augmenting the revenues to his industrious attention to details, honest control of the finances and bestial torture on the defaulters. About his method of collection, Salimullah writes: “. . . on the last day of the month he (Murshid Kuli) exacted from the khalsa, jagir and other departments the amount due, to uttermost dam. He put strict ‘muhasils’ (bailiffs) over the ‘mutasaddis’, ‘amils’, qanungoes and other officers, confining them in the ‘kachari’ or in in the diwan khanah of the Chihil Situn (Hall of Forty Pillars) in Murshidabad, where they were refused food and drink and not suffered to perform the other necessary calls of nature. To these severities were added the cruelties of Nazir Ahmad; this man used to suspend the zamindars by the heels and bastinado them with a switch. . . . And he also used to have them flogged till they consented to pay the money. . . . when Murshid Kuli Khan discovered that an ‘amil’ or zamindar had dissipated the revenue and was unable to make good the deficiency, he compelled the offenders, his wife and children to turn Muhammadans.”<sup>1</sup> The system of revenue collection was simple. The zamindars and talukdars were to pay their stipulated revenue by twelve instalments. In Orissa, the revenue was collected in the form of foodgrains. Gladwin writes: “The prudent management of the new diwan soon raised Bengal to the highest degree of prosperity. Particularly careful in the choice of his officers, he obtained through their means complete information about the actual capacity of the lands and the amount of custom duties.”<sup>2</sup> Murshid Kuli collected the revenue by his agents directly and thereby saved a considerable amount of profits which middlemen or zamindars used to make in the past. The ‘amils’ were held responsible for the collection of revenue from the zamindars.

According to the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* two independent systems of

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Gladwin, *Op.cit.*



account and audit were maintained. The village patwaris maintained one set of accounts and the 'bitikichis' (accountants) the other. The former submitted their accounts to the district qanungos who in turn submitted their consolidated account to the provincial qanungo. The bitikichis submitted their accounts to the district collectors and to the central government simultaneously. Then both the provincial diwan and the provincial qanungo put their joint signatures after comparing the General Detailed Consolidated Account.

The revenue measures of Murshid Kuli Khan produced important results. J. N. Sarkar has observed rightly: "Bengal was at last freed from the double set of leeches who had been 'sucking the people', one the temporary governor bent solely upon making his own pile before being transferred from Bengal and the other the diwan loyally trying to collect the revenue to the last pice. The gross fiscal tyranny and illegal exaction of which the French merchants at Chandernagar complained so often in their letters during Azinnuddin's governorship which made the province depopulated, silver scarce and trade difficult (as they wrote) were now placed under check, because there was only one master to be satisfied. Murshid Kuli as Subahdar demanded only the standard revenue. In realising the state demand under this head, he was severe and even barbarous in his methods of cruelty, but he collected only the regular or legitimate amount of revenue but tormented only those contractors who had defaulted—not every farmer of the revenue."<sup>1</sup> In comparison to his predecessors, Murshid Kuli was modest in his collections and never exacted illegal or extra-revenues as this will be evident from the following chart :

Shaista Khan's accumulations in 18 years	9	crores
Khan, Jahar Bahadur Khan's accumulations in 1 year	2	„
Prince Azim's accumulations in 9 years	8	„

After remitting one crore and 30 lakhs of rupees to the imperial court, "he used to bury the surplus collections and profits which he derived from the Jagirs". The internal peace which Murshid Kuli enforced on the country with strong hands, the material help that he accorded to the peasants increased the people's tax-paying capacity. The whole of the zamindaris of Eastern Bengal were brought under

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 413.

the direct control of the exchequer and their rents were largely increased, the revenue consequently rose far beyond its recent limits. "Murshid Kuli was able to despatch royal revenue to Delhi to the amount of one crore and thirty lakhs, the greater part in specie, escorted by a guard of 300 cavalry and 500 infantry."<sup>1</sup>

Although the annual revenue was despatched to the imperial court in coins, the volume of true money in circulation in the province was significantly small and hence the prices of the local produce did not show any upward trend. "The circulation medium had not increased in a century's time in spite of the growth of production and trade",<sup>2</sup>—will be proved from the fact that about the year 1632 the price of rice at Murshidabad was at four to five maunds a rupee, while in Murshid Kuli's time "the price of rice commonly sold at Murshidabad was at 4 maunds for a rupee and the prices of the other provisions were in proportion,"<sup>3</sup> although larger areas were brought to cultivation under his rule.

The increased land revenue did not bring any significant improvement in the general condition of the people of the province. They were groaning under inhuman torture of the tax-collectors while "gold, pearls and gems piled up in the treasure chamber of Murshidabad palace". The peasantry were at the mercy of the heartless collectors as they had no direct access to the subahdar, although Murshid Kuli administered justice with strong hands and never approved any illegal exactions from the peasants. But his good intentions were proved futile due to the absence of an efficient and disciplined civil servants. And that was the most potent weakness of his administration.

Despite some defects it cannot be gainsaid that for the first time since the foundation of the Mughal power in Bengal, the land revenue system of the province was organised on a sound footing so much so that it served as a model for Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement. From the time of Akbar down to the close of the 17th century, imperial revenue from Bengal was never fixed and certain although Jahangir made some attempts in this direction. After Murshid Kuli's appointment as diwan a regular remittance of imperial revenue from the province became a normal feature. It cannot be denied that this regular flow of revenue from Bengal saved the Mughal army and the imperial family in the Deccan during the most critical days of the

<sup>1</sup> Bradley-Birt., *Op.cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 417.

<sup>3</sup> Gladwin, *Op.cit.*, p. 112.

Mughal empire. Even after the death of Aurangzeb, Murshid Kuli never faltered from his loyalty to the successors of Aurangzeb and continued remitting the imperial share of Bengal revenue.

Nawab Shujauddin Khan was also conscious of the urgency of putting the revenue matters in order. Of course his system did not deviate much from that of his predecessor. His first act after his accession was to undo the wrongs and mitigate the vigours of the previous regime by adopting a conciliatory attitude towards the zamindars on whom depended largely the regularity of state income from revenue sources. He punished the oppressive revenue agents of the previous regime and in some cases confiscated their properties and condemned them to death. He gave orders that the unhappy zamindars, who had been kept in a miserable state of confinement during the long government of his predecessor, should, upon giving security for their good conduct, be permitted to return to the management of their estates.

Shujauddin continued the practice of his predecessor in remitting to the imperial court, at the end of the year, the amount of the revenues and "had the satisfaction to find that notwithstanding his liberal treatment to the zamindars, the revenue, instead of being diminished, had increased; for whereas Murshid Kuli had seldom remitted more than one crore and thirty lakhs of rupees, the amount of his collection for the year 1728 amounted to one crore and forty-eight lakhs, all of which was remitted to Murshidabad by the agents of the imperial banker Jagat Seth without any difficulty or oppression."<sup>1</sup>

Shujauddin remitted Rs. 1,25,000 a year normally to the imperial court. The total revenue and tribute remitted to the imperial court from Bengal and Bihar during Shujauddin's rule of 11 years and 8 months and 13 days amounted to Rs. 14,62,78,338. Grant, however, makes this amount somewhat less, i.e. Rs. 11,81,40,338. Shujauddin made practically no change in the method of collection as prevailed in the days of Murshid Kuli. It was collected through the agency of the zamindars. According to the Minute of Shore, the standard assessment remained the same as Rs. 1,42,45,561. But the Nawab realised a further amount of Rs. 19,14,095 by means of 'abwabs' or additional imports. The imposition of abwabs was, of course, not a new practice; Murshid Kuli also had resorted to such practice. These abwabs were of four kinds,<sup>2</sup> viz. (a) Nazarana Mokarari that

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 450.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, pp. 433-34.

is "fixed pecuniary acknowledgements paid by the zamindars as farmers-general of the king's revenue virtually for improper remissions, indulgences, favour and protection; forbearances of 'hustabood' investigations or privilege of being freed from the immediate superintendence of 'amils'; but ostensibly and favourably to defray the charge of nazars sent to court at the two principal yearly Mussalman festivals and other great ceremonial days, in like manner as the jagirdars or holders of assigned territory were, as Muhammadans, with more propriety obliged to contribute their share of the whole demand" ; (b) Zar Mathoot, that is tax composed of four kinds of "abwabs such as Nazar Pooniah or presents exacted from the zamindars by the officers of the Exchequer at the annual settlement. . . .Baha-i-Khilat or price of the robes bestowed at the same time on the most considerable landholders as token of yearly investiture in their offices of farmers-general of the king's rent" ; Pusta-bandi "for upholding the river banks" and Russom-nazarat or "commission of ten annas per mile exacted by the nazir jamadar or head peon on the treasure brought from the Mofussil"; (c) Mathoot Filkhana or "a partial contribution. . . to defray the expenses of feeding the elephants of both the Nazim and diwan, kept at Murshidabad, levied for the most part on the interior districts. . . ." and (d) Faujdari abwabs or "limited permanent assessments on the land" imposed by the faujdars on the frontier regions.

The zamindars were required to pay these additional imposts in proportion to the standard assessment. In turn, these zamindars were allowed to collect these abwabs from their ryots.

Effects

No share of these abwabs was ever remitted by Shujauddin to the imperial court. Most probably

the entire income from these abwabs was spent on luxury and amusements of the Nawab's family. We are not in a position to assess precisely the effect of these impositions either on the zamindars or on the ryots. But in a general way Shore has observed that the "mode of imposition was fundamentally ruinous both to the ryots and the zamindars; and the direct tendency of it was, to force the latter into extortion and all into fraud, concealment and distress".

Alivardi Khan was the last great nawab of Bengal who not only proved his worth as a great soldier but also a benevolent ruler. The

Alivardi's revenue first eleven years of Alivardi's administration were  
and financial system years of stresses and strains due to chronic Maratha  
raids and Afghan rebellion. And hence he could

do nothing in the direction of internal administration. It was

only after the storm passed off that he realised the need to heal the wounds inflicted by the ravages of the Marathas. He applied himself "with judgment and alacrity to the repose and security of his subjects and never afterwards deviated in the smallest degree from those principles". His first concern was agriculture and the agriculturists and did much to improve agriculture which formed the backbone of prosperity.

In principles, Alivardi followed the revenue system of Murshid Kuli Khan. His mode of collection was not arbitrary at all. Following the precedent of his predecessors, Alivardi settled the 'malguzari' (revenue assessments) with the zamindars on moderate terms. In order to satisfy the government demands, the zamindars took much interest in agriculture and never resorted to oppressing the ryots. Even at times the zamindars instead of collecting revenue forcibly from the peasants, borrowed money on their own account to pay their malguzari to the Nawab's government. There were shroffs or money-lenders "ready to lend money to zamindars when required and even to the ryots which enabled many to cultivate their grounds which otherwise they could not have done".<sup>1</sup>

Alivardi was also liberal in financial matters. Although in general practice he never realised money forcibly from the masses, during the days of Maratha troubles when there was a general fall in revenue collection, the Nawab had to take casual aids from the European traders and the big zamindars. After the conclusion of peace with the Marathas, Alivardi imitating the example of Murshid Kuli and Shujauddin levied abwabs on the zamindars in addition to the standard assessments. These abwabs or additional imposts were of three kinds, viz. 'Chauth Maratha', 'Ahuk and Kist Gour' and Nazarana Mansurganj. The total amount of the abwabs realised during Alivardi's administration was Rs. 22,25,554.<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of Shore this additional impost did not prove heavy on the people as "the resources of the country were, at that period, adequate to the measure of exactions".<sup>3</sup> However it is to be noted that although the Nawab's government gave encouragement to agriculture, the economic condition of the peasants and ryots was not at all satisfactory.

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, Datta, *Alivardi and his Times*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*

Mir Kasim was the last Nawab of Bengal who introduced certain new measures in the existing revenue system of the province. Of course, in doing so, his main aim was to augment the income. In revenue and financial matters Mir Kasim evinced much more interest than in other matters and in the words of Vansittart in these matters alone the Nawab "had any real aptitude or capacity". He possessed keen interest and great proficiency in controlling the revenue accounts and supervising the financial administration in general. "During his short rule", writes Dr. Chatterjee, "he completely changed the spirit of the revenue system which he had inherited from the previous regime and sought to revolutionise it by introducing into it new principles and reviving in a new form the methods and ideas that had once been associated with the administration of some of the former Nazims like Jafar Khan, Shuja Khan or Alivardi Khan".<sup>1</sup> He was very much worried over the laxity and corruption that had crept into the revenue and financial administration of the subah and he was much against the policy underlying it. Mir Kasim's revenue administration is important not only for the fact that it exposed the hollowness of the previous system but also for the fact that it formed the basis of the revenue system of the East India Company in the later days.

The Nawab first directed his attack against the old revenue officials who were proved to be guilty of embezzlements and they were forced to disgorge whatever they had misappropriated. Next, the farmers and collectors who were equally guilty of such crimes were punished with vengeance and their personal properties were confiscated. The Nawab appointed new officials both at the capital and other places with wide powers to unearth the concealed wealth of the former officials and farmers and to collect revenue with vigour. Even the diwan and the deputy diwans were not spared. As the Nawab was always suspicious of the integrity of his officials, there was often changes in the heads of the revenue department. As a matter of fact, "by sheer terrorism Mir Qzsim soon managed to stamp out all corruption and waste."

In the existing revenue system, the qanungos occupied a very important position as they possessed all important information about the value, tenure and measurements of the lands in the parganas. In fact without the cooperation of the qanungos, it was not at all possible

<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee, *Mir Kasim*, p. 277.

to collect the revenue with efficiency as well as to understand the actual value of the lands. Conscious of the importance of the qanungos in revenue matters, Mir Kasim did his best to curb their power and influence and considerably minimised their duties and responsibilities.

An important feature of Mir Kasim's revenue policy was his aversion to the zamindars who played a great role in the revenue system of the country. It was his conviction that the zamindars deprived the government of its due share of the provincial revenue and they earned much by oppressing the ryots in numerous illegal ways. Moreover as a class the zamindars constituted a great political force to be reckoned with. Hence Mir Kasim was bent upon reducing their power and influence and imposing strict control over them. There was every possibility of the extinction of the institution of the zamindars, had Mir Kasim ruled for a reasonable time. His main charges against the zamindars were : (1) that they enjoyed enormous local influence and hence were dangerous for the security of the Nizamat, (2) that some of the zamindars like those of Burdwan, Birbhum and Bishnupur had come to occupy something like semi-independent position. Their territorial and military strength posed a real threat to Mir Kasim's authority, (3) that the revenue and other emoluments enjoyed by the zamindars was considered by the nawab as a great loss to the state, (4) that the zamindars in collusion with the corrupt qanungos deliberately concealed the real value of the lands in their possession and thereby deprived the state of its due share, (5) that most of the zamindars of the province had some sort of dealings with the English against the interests of the Nawab's government and (6) that the zamindars were in the habit of oppressing the ryots and realising various kinds of exactions from them against the revenue policy of the government.

Mir Kasim aimed at putting an end to the prevailing institution of the hereditary zamindars. It was the abrupt end of his rule that saved the institution of the zamindars from total extinction. Had he ruled for a considerable time, the subjects of the state as Shore has observed "would have been reduced to three classes only, an oppressed peasantry, rapacious tax-gatherers and over-awing military".<sup>1</sup> Immediately on his accession to the throne, Mir Kasim, being strengthened by the permission of Vansittart, dispossessed a large number of zamindars of Bihar and appointed in their places 'amilis' and 'tahsildars'. Next he put into confinement the principal zamindars of Bengal.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fifth Report on East India Affairs, II*, p. 17.

For the purpose of augmenting the income from land revenues, the Nawab appropriated the private exactions of the zamindars, faujdars and jagirdars which they were in the habit of collecting from the peasantry. These resumptions were made on the following heads, viz. 'Kifayet hastabud', 'Kifayet faujadari,' 'Kifayet Sair', etc. These resumptions brought an immense increase of revenue.<sup>1</sup>

The Nawab was equally conscious of practicing economy in the matter of revenue collection. The 'amils' whom he appointed in the zamindari estates to collect revenue were made accountable to himself only. The 'amils' were the principal revenue collectors and naturally the position of other revenue officers and the intermediate agencies became minimised. The 'amils' were also to undertake measurements and fixation of rents. Hence through the agency of the 'amils' alone, the Nawab effected great economy in the expenses of revenue collection.

Doubtless, by the various measures noted above, Mir Kasim augmented the provincial exchequer to a considerable extent. But the exact amount of the annual income is not precisely known. On this point Grant and Shore differ from each other. According to Grant the annual income in Bengal alone amounted to Rs. 2,56,24,223,<sup>2</sup> while in the opinion of Shore it amounted to Rs. 24,11,89,124-5-2.<sup>3</sup> Shore's estimate seems to be fairly correct. According to Grant, the net income of the exchequer after defraying the expenses of the civil and military departments was roughly two crores of rupees.

There is no doubt that Mir Kasim had to purchase the 'masnad' of Bengal from the English at a high price and on this score he had to spend a huge amount to gratify the English officials. **Criticism** Moreover, he was conscious of the fact that the English officials would continue their pressure on him for further gratifications. Hence the Nawab was determined from the very outset to free himself from the influence of the English as well as to be truly independent of them. To achieve this ultimate aim he had to amass wealth as far as possible to strengthen his fighting force and government. And this accounts for his revolutionary revenue policy—which however did more harm than good ultimately. It is to be noted that Mir Kasim was greatly inspired by the example of Murshid Kuli, Shujauddin and Alivardi Khan while increasing the

<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee, *Op.cit.*, pp. 284-85.

<sup>2</sup> *Fifth Report, II*, pp. 239-55.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



revenues. The only difference was the extent and volume of exactions. Mir Kasim's exactions from the peasantry were heavier than those of his predecessors. In fact, Mir Kasim "enforced in two years an increase which surpassed the total addition made during the last two centuries".

Mir Kasim's revenue policy was not only strict but also vitiated by exorbitant demands which ultimately antagonised the tax-paying subjects. In the English records Mir Kasim's revenue administration has been described as an organised plunder as Shore has admitted : "I entertain the strongest conviction that Cossim Ali's demand was a mere pillage and rack-rent."

Mir Kasim's revenue policy suffered from another glaring defect. He did not care to re-assess the value of the lands nor he made any effort to re-survey the lands which was necessary to understand the tax-paying capacity of the people. He never cared to know whether the peasantry would be able to bear his exorbitant demands. As a matter of fact, the Nawab was never inspired by any spirit of benevolence. His only ambition was to enhance the income at any cost. The result was disastrous. Already the over-taxed subjects were thrown into a desperate situation which did more harm to the Nawab than any good. As D. Chatterjee has rightly observed : "Mir Kasim's revenue administration, devoid as it was of every principle of sound policy and statesmanship, marked one of the worst periods of rack-rent and exploitation in the revenue history of Bengal."<sup>1</sup>

### III. European Settlements in Bengal and their Relations with the Bengal Nawabs

The Portuguese were the earlier European settlers in Bengal. Their fall in Bengal in 1632 was followed by the entry of other European nations like the Dutch, the English, the French and others. They were mostly traders and came to Bengal with the main object of trade and commerce. Of these European nations, the English prominently and the French to a certain extent became involved in local politics and ultimately the English supplanted the Nawabi rule and established their political authority in Bengal.

**The English East India Company.** The first attempt of the English to open trade with Bengal in 1617 through the influence of Thomas Rao was unsuccessful. The attempts of Hughes and Parker in 1620

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<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee, *Op. cit.*, p. 294.

and that of Peter Mundy in 1632 to establish factories in Patna also proved failure. The first English ship that appeared in the coast of Orissa fared very badly in a fight with the Portuguese. In the records of the early English factors who strove to secure trading concessions in Bengal, there are numerous references to the supremacy of the Portuguese in the local courts and to their possession of most of the ports of the eastern coast. It is to be admitted that for a long time the Portuguese had enjoyed a position of privilege in the sea-borne trade of the country. But after 1632 their trade supremacy gradually began to pass into the hands of the English. Through the good offices of an English physician Dr. Boughton, who cured emperor Shah Jahan of an illness, the English obtained for the first time a farman from the emperor to trade in Bengal duty-free. As the English mainly dealt in over-sea trade, this concession was not likely to injure the interest of the Indian traders. In 1651 the English founded their first factory in Bengal, and six years later they established subordinate agencies at Balasore, Kasimbazar and Patna.

In the beginning, the trade of the English was limited and unprofitable. Before 1651, their annual investment in Bengal was less than one-tenth of the value of the Dutch company's. The civil war in England (1642-48) and England's war with Holland during the regime of Cromwell almost ruined the trade of the East India Company and at one time the Court of Directors in London was thinking in terms of abandoning their trade in Bengal altogether. But after the end of the civil war among the sons of Shah Jahan, when Aurangzeb finally secured the Mughal throne and consolidated his position, the English trade in Bengal began to improve rapidly. By 1680, the Company's exports from Bengal rose up to £150,000 in value and next year to £230,000.

But soon began the troubles with the local government. The Mughal governor in Bengal, Mir Jumla vehemently objected to the trade privilege of the English in Bengal which injured the interests of the Indian traders. However the English silenced the governor's objections by means of bribes. But in 1680 when the emperor Aurangzeb came to know of this discrimination, an order was issued to collect custom at the rate of 2 per cent from the English on their goods. The reluctance of the English to pay the duty brought them into conflict with the Mughal authority. The English Council entertained the hope of regaining their old privileges by resorting to force. They informed the Court of Directors in London that due to the political

Confusion prevailing in India, the Company had a unique opportunity of seizing political power. Europeans like Tavernier believed that "one hundred of our European soldiers would scarcely have any difficulty in vanquishing 1000 of these Indian soldiers."<sup>1</sup> Sir Josiah Child, the then governor of the Company and chairman of the Court of Directors prevailed upon the Directors to "assume the offensive in war whichever opportunity should offer". At last, with the permission of the King of England James II, the Court of Directors fitted out an expedition from England under Admiral Nicholson with the instructions to proceed to Bengal. But the English adventures ultimately ended in disaster and they had to leave Bengal bag and baggage (1686-88). The ease with which the aggressions of the English was suppressed convinced the emperor Aurangzeb that the English could never pose a threat to the Mughal empire. In fact in the early nineties of the 17th century when the emperor was informed that the English were fortifying the villages they had newly acquired from the king of Tanjore, he said : "Possibly my Indian subjects quarrelled with the English. Why should not these foreigners come here from distant lands, arrange for their defence. I will not interfere."<sup>2</sup> The emperor could never believe that the English would ever grab his empire after his death. Hence in 1688 he issued orders for conciliating the English and restoring their trade privileges throughout his empire. Accordingly the Mughal governor in Bengal Ibrahim Khan asked the Madras Council to send their envoy to Dacca for making a settlement. He promised them fair treatment. At last in February 1690 peace was finally concluded with the English on the west coast and in April Aurangzeb ordered Ibrahim Khan to allow the English free-trade as before. Job Charnock was sent from Madras to Bengal as the English Agent. He arrived at Sutanati on 24 August 1690. This was the foundation of Calcutta.

Two farmans<sup>3</sup> of Aurangzeb which settled the affairs of the English in Bengal may be quoted below. The farman given to the Bengal governor Ibrahim Khan ran thus : "You must understand that it has been the good fortune of the English to repent them of their irregular past proceedings and their not being in their former greatness, have, by their vakeels, petitioned for their lives and a pardon for their faults, which out of my extraordinary favour towards them, have accordingly granted. Therefore, upon receipt hereof, my Phirmaund, you must

<sup>1</sup> Philip Anderson, *The English in Western India*, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Stewart, *History of Bengal*, app. VI and VII.

not create there any further trouble, but let them trade freely in your government as formerly. And this order I expect you see strictly observed." The farman of the emperor relating to the trade privileges of the English sent from Surat in 1690 ran thus : "All the English having made a most humble, submissive petition that the ill crimes they have done may be pardoned, and requested a noble Phirmaund, to make their being forgiven manifest and sent their Vakeel, to the heavenly palace, the most illustrious in the world, to get the royal favour ; and Ihtimat Khan, the governor of Surat's petition to the famous court equal to the sky, being arrived that they would present the Great King with a fine of 150,000 rupees to his noble treasury, . . . and would restore the merchant's goods they took away to the owners of them . . . and behave themselves for the future no more in such shameful manner. Therefore His Majesty . . . hath pardoned their faults, mercifully forgiving them . . . ."

**The Dutch East India Company.** The Dutch ships arrived in Bengal for the first time in 1615 though Van Lincotten visited Bengal towards the latter half of the 16th century. The Dutch fleet joined that of the Arrakan king and made its first appearance in Bengal and fought with a Portuguese squadron near the coast of Arrakan. The battle lasted for a day but neither side won decisively. Thereafter, the Dutch continued to trade with Bengal although they did not make any permanent settlement until towards the middle of the 17th century when they established their factory in Chinsura. The Dutch expanded their commercial activities with much rapidity while the Portuguese of Hughli suffered a severe disaster at the hands of the Mughals in 1632. Though the Portuguese continued their trading activities until long after, the Dutch easily over-rivalled them and pushed the Portuguese into insignificance. By the end of Jahangir's reign, the Dutch had already secured an important position in Bengal's trade and commerce and also a sound footing on the soil of Bengal. The Dutch erected their fort Gustavas in Chinsura, founded a silk factory in Kasimbazar, another factory in Baranagar, owned a beautiful garden near Chander-nagar and later on established a station at Fulda for their merchant vessels.<sup>1</sup> Kasimbazar and Patna were the centres of an exceedingly prosperous and profitable Dutch trade. Their export of opium to Java and China brought them enormous profits. "Something like 50 p.c. profit was regularly made on the Dutch Company's turnover in the seventies.

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<sup>1</sup> Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, pp. 124-25.

of the 18th century very largely owing to the enormously profitable trade of Surat, Bengal and Ceylon."<sup>1</sup> But by this time the Dutch had yielded their prominence in Bengal's trade and commerce to the English.

**The French East India Company.** "The first French settlement in Bengal was the result of an accident." The first French ship, the *Fleming*, which made its maiden appearance in Bengal in 1674 did not come of its own accord. It was seized and brought a captive by the Dutch from Balasore to Hughli. The ship was at last set free and the Frenchmen on board the ship founded a small factory close to the Dutch garden at Chinsura.

The beginning of the European settlements in India are to be traced mainly to the farmans and parwanas granted by the emperors and provincial governors and sometimes even to 'dastaks' by subordinate officials like faujdars. Unfortunately the farmans and parwanas granted to the French company for its establishment in Bengal are for the most part lost and only a few of them have been reproduced in the "Letters et Conventions des Gouverneurs de Pondichery avec differents Princes Hindous"—A document entitled "Manuscripts des Anciennes Archives de l'Inde Francaise Pondichery" is a very interesting document and fills up the gaps in our existing knowledge of the beginnings of the French settlements in Bengal. It contains 18 farmans and parwanas granted on different occasions from May 1690 to December 1734. The first farman obtained by the French in Bengal is lost. It was the one received by Duplax in 1674 from Shaista Khan, permitting the French to establish their factories at all the important trading centres of the province. However, the French made no serious efforts to take opportunity of the farman. The foundation of the great French settlement of Chandernagar is believed to have originated in the farman of Aurangzeb granted to the French in 1668. The French, however, did not put any difficulty in the way of the Portuguese trade in Bengal. The farman of Ibrahim Khan, the Mughal governor of Bengal, addressed to Mons. Deslandes on 29 May 1690 gave an impetus to the French trading activities in Bengal. The farman relates to the difficulties created by the Dutch to prevent the French from building their factory on a plot of land purchased by them in the village of Borokishanpur (modern Chandernagar) because of the close proximity of the Dutch settlement. In the farman noted above, Ibrahim Khan assured the French thus : "I have written a parwanah to Mir Muhammad

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<sup>1</sup> Camb., *History of India*, V, p. 57.

Akbar to prohibit the Dutch and prevent them from giving you any trouble for constructing the house, so that you may build it with security and tranquility." Another parwana of the same date addressed to the village officers of Borokishanpur states that "the Director of the French Company has purchased a plot of land of 61 bighas in the village of Borokishenpur and the 'pattas' having them sealed by the Qazi, he has full legal rights to construct a house there and the Dutch have no authority to prevent it". On the strength of this parwana, a 'dastak' was issued in 1691 by Mir Akbar, the Mughal faujdar of Hughli, prohibiting the Dutch from giving any more trouble to the French in the construction of their factory.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the farmans and parwanas issued in favour of the French, they could not make much headway in their commercial pursuits compared to other European trading nations till 1693. And this was mainly due to the want of imperial patronage. However this disadvantage was ultimately removed by a farman of Aurangzeb (dated 14th of the month of Safar of the 36th year of Aurangzeb's reign) which allowed the French to carry on their trade throughout Bengal, Bihar and Orissa on the same terms and conditions as enjoyed by the Dutch. "A few days ago, it was represented to His Majesty by the request of Kifayat Khan, diwan and the governor of Murshidabad that Mons. Deslandes, Director of the French Company in the kingdom of Bengal, desired to establish trade and commerce in the kingdom of Bengal and Orissa and in the province of Bihar or Patna. His Imperial Majesty would show him the favour of granting him a farman . . . he promised for this purpose a present of Rs. 40,000 for the emperor and another one of Rs. 10,000 for the governor of Murshidabad . . . The diwan is to take 'muchalka' or written bond from Mons. Deslandes by which he would promise to pay duties on the same footing as the Dutch and to make the present which he promised as soon as he will receive the farman of His Majesty . . . Kifayat Khan will take care to send us a copy as soon as he will receive it from Mons. Deslandes."<sup>2</sup> In order to prevent disputes and conflicts between the French and the Dutch, a parwana issued to Mir Muhammad Hussain, the faujdar of Hughli, (dated 7th of the month Ziqad of the 39th of Aurangzeb's reign) directed him to prevent the French and the Dutch from making war between themselves in Bengal and instructed the

<sup>1</sup> S. P. Sen, *Farmers and Parwanahs for the Establishment of the French in Bengal*, Vide, *History Record Commission of 1946*.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Ibid*.

faujdar to maintain peace at all cost in Hughli. In 1698 the French obtained a confirmation of their commercial privileges from Prince Shuja, the subahdar of Bengal.

This was the position of the principal European trading companies at the turn of the 18th century.

### *Relations with the Nawabs of Bengal*

The English, the French and the Dutch were the chief European trading nations in Bengal, besides a number of minor European traders like Austrains, Polish, Danish and Swedish. The trading activities of the first of these European companies were on the whole flourishing in spite of occasional obstructions from the local government.

Murshid Kuli Khan was not favourably disposed to the English initially because of the privileges enjoyed by them in Bengal. The English were allowed to trade in Bengal duty free on payment of 3000 rupees annually. As Salimullah Murshid Kuli and the English writes that generally Murshid Kuli was jealous of the growing power and commercial prosperity of the Europeans in Bengal. Of course, Murshid Kuli was sensible to the fact that prosperity of Bengal depended much on its advantageous trade. He therefore was very generous to the traders and gave every encouragement to foreign merchants, especially to the Mughals and Persians from whom he only exacted the prescribed duties of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. But he was also a statesman and observed with jealousy the fortified factories of the Europeans and the advantages that the English had over the native merchants in consequence of the farmans which they had obtained by means of bribery and corruption and which permitted them to trade either duty free or for the paltry consideration of 3000 rupees per annum. When therefore, the English East India Company applied for a fresh farman in 1704, Murshid Kuli got the desired opportunity of intervening in the affairs of the English. The opportunity came when the old and the new English companies became amalgamated and the United Company prayed for a fresh farman. Murshid Kuli refused to recognise the argument advanced by the representatives of the Company and he compelled them to pay Rs. 6000 as a total contribution of the two companies presently and demanded twenty thousand rupees for a fresh 'sanad'. As the English agents were aware of the fact that without the diwan's permission nothing could be done in this direction, they ultimately agreed to satisfy the diwan. But meanwhile Murshid Kuli

changed his mind and demanded thirty thousand rupees. However a compromise was effected and the company agreed to pay twenty-five thousand rupees for the liberty of free trade as well as for founding the Kasimbazar factory.

But soon troubles began afresh between Murshid Kuli and the English Company. When the former felt himself secure in the government of Bengal in 1713, he set at naught the previous orders of Prince Shuja and of emperor Aurangzeb and demanded from the English either the same duties that were paid by the local Hindu merchants or a constant renewal of presents both to himself and to all their subordinate officials. Such conduct naturally irritated the English agents and they sent a report of their grievances to the Court

of Directors in London and sought their permission to send an embassy to Delhi to complain to the emperor of the diwan's conduct. Their suggestion was approved by the Court of Directors and the English

governors of Madras and Bombay were instructed to unite their grievances in the same petition with those of Bengal.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly the English governor of Calcutta, William Hedges selected John Surman and Edward Stephenson for proceeding to Delhi as the Company's envoys. William Hamilton also accompanied the embassy as surgeon. After a march of three months, the English envoys reached Delhi on 8 July 1713. The envoys chose for their patron a person named Khan Durran, a hot favourite of the emperor Farrukh Siyar. Meanwhile, Murshid Kuli, who considered the English mission to Delhi as an imputation against the integrity of his conduct, took much pains to frustrate its success. However, at length, in consequence of the strong recommendation of Khan Durran, the emperor permitted Hamilton to attend him. After experiencing varied fortunes at the imperial court, the English envoys at length presented their petition to the emperor in January 1716. It prayed<sup>2</sup> (1) "that a *destak* or passport signed by the President of Calcutta, should exempt the goods it specified from being stopped or examined by the officers of the Bengal government under any pretence, (2) that the officers of the mint at Murshidabad, should at all times, when required, allow three days in the week for the coinage of the English company's money, (3) that all persons, whether Europeans or natives, who might be indebted or accountable to the company, should be delivered up to the Presidency at Calcutta on the

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, pp. 427-28.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 431.



first demand, (4) that the English might purchase the lordship of 38 towns with the same immunities as the prince Azim-us-Shan had permitted them to buy Calcutta, Chuttanauty and Govindpore.”

On the advice of Khan Durran, the English embassy presented two more petitions to the emperor in consequence of which, Syed Abdullah Khan, the wazir was at length induced to abandon all his objections. But to the astonishment of the English embassy the mandates were issued not under the emperor's seal but that of the Wazir which although carrying great authority in the provinces near the capital, was likely to be little respected by the distant subahdars to whom these orders were addressed. Surman and Stephenson refused to accept the parwanas of the Wazir, and continued their stay at the capital until they should obtain patents under the royal seal. Meanwhile, Murshid Kuli's agents exerted themselves to thwart the English mission and by means of bribes postponed the business for fourteen months. “At length the ambassadors were advised to bribe a favourite eunuch in the seraglio, and although not very sanguine in their expectations from this measure, were induced to comply and to their great surprise, as soon as the money was paid, the Wazir and all his dependents, appeared as much inclined to forward their views as they had hitherto been averse and soon after 34 patents embracing all the different subjects of the petition, were issued in the emperor's name and the principal one was authenticated by the imperial seal.”<sup>1</sup> The English envoys, having thus obtained the imperial patents, left Delhi in July 1717 and came back to Bengal.

Murshid Kuli tried to frustrate the article of the imperial farman relating to the permission given to the English to purchase the “38 towns” which would have given them a district extending ten miles south of Calcutta along the both banks of the river Hughli. Without openly opposing the imperial mandate, Murshid Kuli secretly threatened the proprietors of the land against any such transfer to the English. “The company's servants confiding too much in the sanction of the emperor's sanction, neglected the more efficacious means of bribing the Nawab to compliance with their wishes. Thus the most important concession which had been obtained by the embassy was entirely lost.”<sup>2</sup> Murshid Kuli however complied with other concessions contained in the imperial farman.

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *Op.cit.*, p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

The farman obtained by the Surman embassy greatly augmented the English trade. They were allowed to trade duty free and their trade was not liable to be stopped by the local government.

Murshid Kuli But soon a dispute arose over the issue of internal  
disputed some trade. The question arose as to whether the English  
privileges of the were entitled, under the farman, to participate  
English in the internal trade and commerce of Bengal.

Although the imperial farman did not specifically mention it, Murshid Kuli interpreted that the English trade was to be restricted to over-sea trade "alleging that as salt, betelnut, tobacco and several other articles of general consumption, were either framed out in monopolies or taxed with heavy duties, if the English were allowed to trade in these articles, it would not only be a great injury to all the other merchants but a very considerable diminution of the public revenue."<sup>1</sup> The English Company accepted the arguments of Murshid Kuli and applied themselves most earnestly to make the most advantage of those privileges which were not contested by the local government. Gradually Calcutta began to grow and the English commerce began to develop. As Salimullah writes: "The mild and equitable conduct of the English in their settlement gained them the confidence and esteem of the natives; which joined to the consideration of the privileges and immunities which the Company enjoyed, induced numbers to remove thither with their families; so that in a short time Calcutta became an extensive and populous city."<sup>2</sup> In fact, by 1750 Calcutta's population rose to one lakh as compared with the 15,000 of 1705.

The French East India Company was in a state of decline during the period from 1700 to 1740. The French trade began to improve only after the assumption of the control of their affairs by

Murshid Kuli Dumars and Dupleix. The causes of the decline of the  
and the French French trade were involvement of France in the war of  
Spanish Succession, the demoralisation of the Bourbon  
administration in France and woeful poverty of the French Company. It was the parwana of Murshid Kuli Khan that gave the French some relief. It permitted the establishment of a French settlement and commerce at Kasimbazar. This fresh parwana bears evidence of the fact that despite previous farmans and parwanas local officials continued to create difficulties for French trading operations. In

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 418.

this parwana, Murshid Kuli assured Mons De La Bat that he had issued orders to the custom and toll collectors to allow French trade to be carried on undisturbed. Another farman was granted to the French by Farrukh Siyar reducing custom duties payable by the French from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. On 9 January 1722, the French secured a farman which placed them on the same footing as the Dutch. In conformity with this farman Murshid Kuli issued a parwana which ran thus : "The French Company having been obliged to suspend its commerce and the despatch of its ships to India during certain years because of war. . . M. D'Ardancourt, Director of the Company, has come to re-establish the commerce. As the Dutch obtained from the emperor Farrukh Siyar, a farman reducing the duty to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. M. D'Arden-court has sent his wakil to us, praying that he may be granted a parwana stamped with our seal in which the duty of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. would be reduced to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. on the same footing as the Dutch. For this he promises to pay Rs. 40,000 to the Emperor and Rs. 10,000 to the Nawab of Bengal. Having received the said Rs. 10,000 we have given him the present parwana. Let none demand more than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. duty, nor stop their boats and merchandise."<sup>1</sup>

The French had purchased the estate of Borokishanpur in 1715. But due to the oppressions of the officials of Hughli, the inhabitants were compelled to leave the estate of Borokishanpur which injured the French trade greatly. On the compliant of the French, Kamaruddin Khan, the Wazir of the emperor Muhammad Shah issued a parwana prohibiting the officials of Hughli and Satgaon from maltreating the inhabitants of the village.

The French trade in India as well as in Bengal began to improve considerably after the two French companies (The Company of the East Indies and China and the Company of the West) were united by Jean Law. The new company gave a turn to the French trade by removing all internal disputes and inconsistencies and by acquiring all existing factories. The settlements of Chandernagar and Balasore were further improved. Before the death of Murshid Kuli the French company considerably improved its fortune and they were so solvent that they could grant a loan of Rs. 200,000 to the English.

As has been told already earlier that throughout the 17th and the first half of the 18th century, the Dutch played a very important part in Bengal's over-sea trade and commerce. They had factories at

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Indian History Record Commission*, 1946.

various places in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The company's exports exceeded its imports. The export of cotton fabrics and raw silk and the import of precious metals and copper played an important role in the Dutch trade. Besides, the Dutch used to carry "Indonesian pepper and spices to its Bengal factories, also cinnamon, areca-nuts and chauks from Ceylon, tin from Malacca and Siam, Persian tobacco, sandalwood from the Coromandel coast..."

Upon the arrival of Murshid Kuli Khan the Dutch approached him for a fresh parwana in favour of their trade. Since the time of Shaista Khan, the Dutch had been experiencing serious difficulties and occasional stoppage of their trade in the hands of the custom officials, as their letter of 5 January 1708 reveals, "we have met with here (Bengal) of late years great abuses and obstructions to our trade more particularly as to our goods that come from Patna, Dacca, Rajmahal, Malda, Cassimbazar and every little governor having erected all along the river-chowkies who extort custom and what pleases and will pay no deference to the royal authority..." In response to the appeal of the Dutch factors, Murshid Kuli asked them to make a payment of Rs. 20,000 to the viceroy. The company at once paid the sum but Murshid Kuli began to raise his demand. In 1704 the Dutch had to pay the diwan a sum of rupees 30,000 and at last obtained his parwana. But the Dutch trade was again interrupted by the faujdar of Hughli who demanded further gratification. The Dutch reacted sharply and threatened to set fire to the town.

After 1707 the Dutch trade again began to prosper and Alexander Hamilton who visited Bengal during this period had testified to the prosperity of the Dutch settlement of Chinsura. The company had brisk trade at Malda, Kasimbazar, Chinsura and Patna. In 1708 and 1709 the Dutch secured two farmans from the Delhi emperor according to which they were required to pay only 2½ p.c. duty at Hughli. In 1711, on the request of the Dutch, Murshid Kuli granted them a parwana.

The death of the emperor Bahadur Shah in February 1712 once again threatened a civil war in the country. The European trading companies took necessary precautions for their safety. The Dutch apprehending political turmoil in Bengal tried to make themselves "as defensive as they can", although they could save themselves at Patna from the ravages of the imperial officials. However, upon the accession of Jahandar Shah, the Dutch sent an embassy to Delhi

with a list of their grievances backed by huge presents for the emperor and his entourage. Being satisfied with the presents, the emperor granted the Dutch a fresh farman in 1712 satisfying most of their grievances. But meanwhile Jahandar Shah was defeated and killed and Farrukh Siyar ascended the imperial throne. Accordingly, the Dutch again approached the emperor for a fresh farman confirming the privileges granted by Jahandar Shah. The emperor issued 'hosbul hookum' assuring the Dutch company in Bengal of the privileges granted by the former farmans. But the imperial farmans and sanads were of little use to the Dutch. In 1720, they had to pay a sum of Rs. 20,000 over and above the prescribed custom duties to gratify the Mughal officials in Bengal. Murshid Kuli demanded of the Dutch a suitable 'nazrana' for the emperor Muhammad Shah. A great tussel ensued over this demand of Murshid Kuli. At last the Dutch had to satisfy the former by agreeing to pay a sum of Rs. 30,000. In 1722, the Dutch once again became involved in a trouble with Murshid Kuli. The Dutch agent at Dacca was charged with an alleged defalcation of Rs. 50,000. However at the intervention of the English, the Dutch agent at Murshidabad satisfied the Nawab and gave a security bond. Henceforth the Dutch experienced no trouble in Bengal till the close of Murshid Kuli Khan's rule.

The trade of the English, the Dutch and the French, on the whole, was flourishing in spite of occasional stoppage and disturbances. The English Council in Calcutta might well write to the Court of Directors on 16 January 1733 thus : "Have a prospect of despatching the ships in good time notwithstanding there has been a greater demand for goods this year than ever was known, the French sending home five ships directly for Europe." The English maintained a strict watch over their brokers and exerted themselves to see that there was no abuse of their 'dastaks' and no private traders should interfere with the Company's trade. They sometimes co-operated with the Dutch and the French "in all legal measures to prevent interlopers from trading".

Meanwhile the gradual improvement of the trade of the Ostend Company (Austrian) had been causing much anxiety to the English and the Dutch.

As regards the Ostend Company, it is to be noted that about the year 1717 some merchants of the Austrian Netherlands sent two ships to India with the object of participating in the advantageous

commerce of the East. This attempt of the Austrian merchants encouraged others and an application was made to the court of Vienna for necessary permission to establish an East India Company at Ostend. Against vehement protest from the English, the Dutch and the French, the emperor of Germany granted in August 1723 to the merchants of the Austrian Netherlands his letters-patent authorising them to trade to the East-Indies under the authority of the Ostend Company. This was the origin of the company. Shortly one of the private ships from the Netherlands arrived in the Ganges, succeeded in procuring a full cargo with the aid of the French and before the return voyage, the captain of the ship applied to Murshid Kuli Khan for a piece of land to erect a factory should the company be formed. "As the Nawab," writes Stewart, "was not only anxious to increase the trade of the province, but also desirous of introducing more rivals to the English of whose privileges it has been already seen he was excessively jealous, he immediately complied with the request and assigned the village of Bankibazar situated on the eastern side of the river, fifteen miles above Calcutta for the residence of the 'Germans'."<sup>1</sup>

In 1724, an Ostend ship named the *Emperor Charles* furnished with 30 guns, for the first time after the establishment of the Ostend Company arrived in Bengal. Although the ship was lost while going up the Ganges, its officers and crew took possession of Bankibazar and erected temporary houses. Within 2 years three more ships arrived in Bengal and founded the Ostend trade and their factory quickly rose to prominence. In the beginning the Ostend factors used to live in thatched houses but shortly they raised brick houses and enclosed their factory with a wall. After flourishing for some time, the tide of fortune of the Ostend Company began to roll back. Upon the strong remonstrances of the English, the Dutch and the French, the Emperor of Germany revoked the charter granted to the Ostend Company and agreed "that all traffic between his subjects of the Austrian Netherlands and the East Indies should cease for seven years". In spite of the cancellation of the charter, the Ostenders continued their trade in Bengal. Hence the English and the Dutch jointly prevailed upon the Nawab Shujauddin Khan to prohibit the Germans from trading to Bengal and handsomely bribed the faujdar of Hughli. The latter

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 456.

sent a body of troops against the Ostenders under the command of Mir Jafar Khan who besieged their factory at Bankibazar and chastised them. The English in conjunction with the Dutch paid a sum of two lakhs to the Nawab "for his connivance at their taking the Ostend ships." Although the Ostenders suffered a severe blow, they continued their trade in some form or other till 1744 when under the order of the Nawab Alivardi Khan the Ostend Company was thoroughly suppressed and the factors were driven out of the Hughli river.

Nawab Shujauddin Khan, being of liberal disposition and averse to trouble, allowed the English and other European traders to enjoy the privileges that had been granted to them by the emperor Farrukh Siyar and by former governors. But he was strict in asserting his authority over them. He has been described by the English as a "rash and powerful subah" and never thought it wise to come to an open conflict with him as the English Council at Calcutta apprehended that any dispute with the Nawab "will be a great advantage to their neighbours who would push their trade with the more vigour and not unlikely underhand assist the government in order to supplant them, unless the Dutch and French Companies would enter into an agreement to resent all insults offered to either nation".<sup>1</sup> Of course, from time to time the English had to satisfy the greed of the Nawab and that of his avaricious officers by costly presents and large sums of money. Often their trade was hampered and interfered with by imposing 'abwabs' and other kinds of tolls. Such interference once led to an open clash when the faujdar of Hughli stopped a boat laden with bales of silk belonging to the English Company with a view to extort money from them. Consequently the English sent a party of soldiers from Calcutta who terrified the faujdar and rescued the silk and other goods from the hands of the faujdar. This transaction was represented to the Nawab by the faujdar as a criminal offence and to punish the English he secured from the Nawab a body of troops and stopped all supplies to the English settlements in Calcutta and at Kasimbazar. The English were at last compelled to conciliate the Nawab by promising him a payment of three lakhs of rupees as nazars. In 1733 the Nawab's officers again came into clash with the English factors at Dacca and Jogdia and for some time at these two places the English trade was almost brought to a standstill. Henceforth the English Council in Calcutta avoided "engaging in dispute with the government when

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 431.

their privileges were attacked". The English Council was of the opinion that "in relation to the impositions of the government. . . it will be most advisable to submit to the expenses by making presents now and then to the under officers of the Durbar and those that have authority in several other places (to prevent them) from doing them ill offices".<sup>1</sup> In spite of this best intentions of avoiding trouble with the local government, the English had to spend much for the resumption of their business. In 1735 the Nawab again made a demand of rent of their towns which fell in arrears from the date when it was paid in the days of Murshid Kuli Khan. The Nawab also made the same demand on the Dutch for their settlement at Baranagar. Observing the delaying tactics of the English in clearing the arrears, the Nawab instructed the custom officials to stop the salt-petre trade of the English at Patna. Being threatened by total stoppage of their trade, the chief of the English factory at Kasimbazar, Barker, was authorised at last by the Council to accommodate the matters with the Nawab as the Dutch had already done. The Nawab was at last conciliated by a payment of 55,000 rupees and the English Company obtained a parwana for the currency of their trade. Since then till the close of Shujauddin's regime, there was no more trouble between the local government and the Europeans.

Alivardi Khan was the last Nawab of Bengal who succeeded in maintaining strict control over the European traders while allowing them to carry on their trade peacefully. He was the last Nawab again who looked upon the European trade as an important source of state-income while at the same time he was not unmindful of the interests of the local traders. His sound statesmanship is also eloquently evident in the fact that he never allowed the European nations to take part in the local politics nor allowed them to make any sort of war-like preparations in the province.

About his attitude towards the European traders, Scrafton writes, that Alivardi "used to compare the Europeans to a hive of bees of whose honey you might reap the benefit but that if you disturb their hive they would sting you to death".<sup>2</sup> J. Law writes : "He (the Nawab) understood perfectly well the interests of his government, favoured the poor merchants and administered justice when complaints

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Ibid.*, p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> Scrafton, *Reflections*, etc., p. 52.



succeeded in reaching him.<sup>1</sup> Once at the instigation of the Nawab's Afghan General Mustafa Khan, the Nawab's nephews Shahmat Jang and Saulat Jang tried to prevail upon the Nawab to expel the English from the province. To such suggestion, Alivardi replied thus : "My dear children, Mustafa Khan is a soldier of fortune. . . he wishes that I should always have occasion to employ him and to put it in his power to ask favours for himself and his friends; but in the name of common-sense, why should you join issue with him ? What wrong have the English done that I should wish them ill ? Look at yonder plains covered with grass; should you set fire to it, there would be no stopping its progress; and who is the man then who shall put out a fire that break forth at sea and from thence come out upon land ? Beware of lending an ear to such proposals again. For they will produce nothing but evil".<sup>2</sup>

Of course it would not be correct to suppose that Alivardi ever abstained from harassing the European traders or that he never extorted illegal gratifications from them. The Maratha invasions which heavily taxed the financial resources of the Bengal government, gave the Nawab a pretext to ask the European companies to render him financial help for the security of the province. His argument was that the prosperity and advancement of the European trade required the safety and security of the province against foreign invasions and raids.

During the Maratha raids the Nawab exacted money from time to time under various pretexts from the English, the Dutch and the French. In July 1744, the Nawab accused the English of aiding the Marathas and pointed out that "the English (who now) carried on the trade of the whole world, used (formerly) to have 4 or 5 ships, but now brought 40 or 50 sails which belonged not to the company. . ." The English were ordered to pay 3 millions of rupees to clear off the arrears of his soldiers. To realise the demand, the agents of the Company were put under arrest and military guards were posted at their factories. The trade of the Company was put to virtual suspension. In these circumstances, the Company had to satisfy the Nawab by offering a sum of 40,000 to 50,000 rupees. But the sum was considered too small by Jagat Seth Fatehchand who frankly told the English Company that if he (Fatehchand) were authorised "to offer five lakhs, he would endeavour to prevail on the Nawab to accept it, the French and the

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<sup>1</sup> Vide, Hill, *Bengal in 1756-57*, II, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *Elliot*, VIII, p. 21.

Dutch had already agreed to pay their share on the Nawab's settling with the English and that in Shujauddin's time a much larger sum was paid. . . ." The English Council raised their offer to one lakh of rupees which still failed to satisfy the Nawab who threatened them to "surround all the factories and prevent them getting provisions, if that did not make them comply with his demands, (then he) would seize all their money and goods at the 'aurungs'."<sup>1</sup> At last on a payment of three lakhs and a half necessary parwana was issued for the currency of their business.

In his eagerness to control the trade of the Europeans in his province, the Nawab never allowed any European company in the province to hamper the trading operations of another European company or companies. When in the year 1748 the English captured unlawfully some trading vessels of the Armenian, the Nawab reacted very sharply. In his parwana to Barwell, the English Company's governor in Calcutta, the Nawab expressed his attitude thus: ". . . These merchants are the kingdom's benefactors, their imports and exports are an advantage to all men and their complaints are so grievous that I cannot forbear any longer giving ear to them. As you are not permitted to commit piracies, therefore, I now write to you that on receipt of this you deliver up all the merchants' goods. . . otherwise you may be assured a due chastisement in such manner as you least expect."<sup>2</sup> After issuing the parwana, the Nawab took various repressive measures against the English in their different factories. Ultimately the English had to conciliate the Nawab by compensating the losses suffered by the Armanians whereupon the Nawab issued fresh orders for lifting the restrictions that had been put on the trade of the English company and the Nawab's soldiers were withdrawn from their factories.

Alivardi, while eager to foster European trade and commerce, was equally anxious to prevent them from taking part in the internal politics of the province as well as establishing their political influence there. He closely watched the movements of the Europeans in Bengal during the Anglo-French conflicts in the Daccan. The progress of the French and the English on the Coromandal coast as well as in the Deccan made the Nawab apprehensive of the fact that sooner or later the Europeans would make similar enterprises in Bengal. Hence as soon as he was informed that the English and the French had been

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to Court*, 8 Nov., 1744.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide, Datta, Alivardi and his Times*, p. 148.

raising fortifications in Calcutta and Chandernagar, he ordered for their immediate destruction. He bluntly told the English and the French Vakils at his darbar thus, "you are merchants; what need have you for a fortress? Being under my protection, you have no enemies to fear."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Nawab tried his best to enforce this policy of neutrality on the European nations in Bengal and forbade them from committing any hostilities against each other. To the credit of Alivardi it must be admitted that during his regime the Europeans lived in peace in Bengal although they were hostile to each other elsewhere. "Alivardi's behaviour", writes Dr. Datta," towards the Europeans was indeed strict, but it was not unnecessarily harsh. . . .He exacted money from the Europeans occasionally under pressing financial needs due to a combination of troubles, external as well as internal. . . .He had certainly no desire to expel the Europeans from his province or to injure their trade in any way."<sup>2</sup>

From the death of Alivardi to the grant of the diwani to the English, the latter played a very important role in Bengal politics which ultimately raised them to a supreme position politically and commercially in the eastern provinces. This aspect of Bengal history has been discussed earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, *Op.cit.*, III, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Datta, *Op.cit.*, p. 161.

## CHAPTER 14

### SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF BENGAL DURING MUGHAL RULE

It is indeed important to know what the material, social and cultural conditions of the people of Bengal were during the Mughal rule in Bengal. The subject needs discussion in two distinct phases—one from the time of Akbar to the end of Aurangzeb's reign and the other under the Nawabs of Bengal from Murshid Kuli Khan to the grant of diwani.

#### *Social Life of Bengal under the Emperors*

The first quarter of a century of Mughal rule in Bengal witnessed the working of certain new forces which gave a new turn to Bengal's social life. During this period and after till the close of the 17th century Bengal came into close contact with the rest of India and the social and cultural changes that came about due to this contact mark a most important stage in the social and cultural evolution of modern Bengal. It is true that the Mughal emperors did not introduce these changes in Bengal's social life. It was the political change and the imperial administration that made the development of these forces possible.

Throughout the period under review, culture in Bengal was closely inter-linked with the religious life of the people. The literature of the period bears eloquent testimony to the fact that religion predominated the culture of medieval Bengal. The poets and scholars of this period expressed themselves in ecstatic lyrics of a mystic-symbolic style or endeavoured to immortalise the popular legends. Most of the poets and literatuers put much emphasis on the philosophy and rituals of particular cults or creeds. Even while translating the Indian epics the Bengal poets gave much vent to their religious feelings.

As in literature, so also in other forms of cultural activity influence of religion is marked. In the architecture of this part like mosques and temples as well as in paintings, the influence of religion is abundantly marked.

During the first half century of Mughal rule in Bengal, the Bhakti movement was at its peak and Vaishnavism greatly influenced the

Inter-relation of  
religion and  
culture

thoughts, habits and culture of Bengal. The basic principle of this creed is Bhakti or personal devotion to God. This Bhakti creed had been known long before in other parts of India. But in Bengal the teachings of Chaitanya made the theory of Bhakti creed almost reality to the people of Bengal and Orissa. The Vaishnavism, its rituals, its rules of life and its discipline re-oriented Bengal's cultural life. Although Chaitanya did not found a church nor left any strong organisation, his religion had made Bengali Hindu society what it is today. Apart from the moral reformation of the upper and middle classes, Vaishnavism uplifted the lower ranks of society and the illiterate masses by carrying religion to their doors. "Thus Vaishnavism has proved the saviour of the poor; it has proclaimed the dignity of every man as possessing within himself a particle of the divine soul."<sup>1</sup> It was the Vaishnavas who opened the door of knowledge to the women-folk of Bengal and thereby paved the way for cultural uplift among them. Moreover, the Vaishnava saints by preaching the teachings of Chaitanya among the aboriginal tribes, brought them in touch with the higher culture and reoriented their lives after ages of neglect. These aboriginal tribes, who had been in the grip of utter superstition, saw in the Vaishnavism a ray of their deliverance from their prevalent state of degradation.

But it would be wrong to suppose that all that was created during this period was predominantly religious in character. "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Bengal attained a position of pre-eminence in India's cultural life chiefly due to her achievements in the field of Navyanayaya. Religion had no direct bearing on this highly abstract subject."<sup>2</sup>

During the regime of the emperors, Sanskrit learning, which had been greatly crippled in Bengal after the disappearance of Hindu court patronage, revived under the influence of Cultivation of Sanskrit and Persian Vaishnavism. This creed contributed much to the revival of Sanskrit-learning and creation of a new Bengali literature. "It has vivified and sweetened Bengal's intellectual life, no less than the spiritual greatly broadened the basis of our culture."<sup>3</sup> Truly speaking, this renaissance was the work of the people themselves. As a matter of fact, the Mughal government turned our education in another direction that is Persian.

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir*, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 222.

Persian became the court language in Bengal and the knowledge of Persian became indispensable for state services. The revenue officials both Hindus and Muslims (whose mother tongue was Bengali) had to learn Persian as the records were maintained in that language. Even the Bengal zamindars had to learn Persian with a view to get an access to the viceregal court as well as to secure sympathy of the upper class imperial officials. "Gradually (and notably in the 18th century) Persian culture infiltrated from the subahdar's court to that of the great Hindu Rajahs—such as those of Nadia and Burdwan."<sup>1</sup>

So far as Sanskrit literature in Bengal is concerned, it is to be noted that Bengal's contribution to Sanskrit literature during this period was less voluminous than what it was in the preceding age. The creative period of Vaishnava philosophy which assumed great proportion in the preceding epoch was already over. By the end of the 16th century the works on Smiriti also dwindled. Although Sanskrit learning was becoming less significant during this age than what was in the preceding epoch, a few noted Sanskrit books were produced during the first half century of Mughal rule in Bengal. Mention may be made of Rudra Naya—Vachaspati's works as well as those of Vaiswanatha Siddhantapanchanana. These works "appear to be mere products of an old habit which still persists, but had lost its innate vitality".

Hindu religious life in Bengal in this period contained several distinct elements. Of course it is very difficult to make a clear-cut distinction among these constituent elements. Broadly speaking within the fold of Hinduism Neo-vaishnavism, Hindu religious life in Mughal Bengal Vaishnava sahajiya and Sakta-tantric cult had been playing somewhat a stronger role. Besides these major religious movements, there was the religion of the masses who revered all and sundry.

Neo-vaishnavism, though somewhat in a limited sense, had a great influence on the Bengali Hindus. It is to be noted that in spite of Chaitnaya's Bhakti movement, men of lower castes were greatly influenced by Vaishnavism than the upper castes in West Bengal. But in East Bengal majority of the people including lower and higher castes were influenced by Sakta-Tantric creed. In fact, in Bengal as a whole, Vaishnavism was the faith of a powerful minority. The influence of Vaishnavism on the life of the Bengali Hindus in the 16th century

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

was far-reaching and sexual immorality and drinking habit was rampant among the Vaishnavas of the lower castes. But the upper caste Vaishnavas were free from such evils. Among the lower caste Vaishnavas, the 'Vairagi's' formed a classless society and they represented a higher spiritual and social outlook which was not evident among the members of other lower orders. They abstained from drinking and unclean food. Devotional songs and 'nama-samkritana' as performed by the Vairagis made them a most revered class among the Bengali Hindus.

It has often been claimed on behalf of the Vaishnavas that they introduced a revolutionary change in Bengal's the then society. But this claim is to be accepted with certain reservations. Because Vaishnavism could not do away with caste system in the Bengali Hindu society. The Brahmins still continued to hold a place of honour in the society in spite of the propagation of the doctrine of universalism by the Vaishnavas. Inter-caste marriage could not be introduced by the Vaishnavas and even inter-dining among the various castes could not be brought into practice. However within these limitations, caste system among the Vaishnavas was not so rigorous as it was in other castes. Untouchability was to some extent modified.

At the same time some unwholesome practices gradually grew up in the society of the Vaishnavas. Jayananda's *Chaitanyamangala* refers to a class of people who were turning Vaishnavism in a profession. Begging by the Vaishnavas developed into a regular practice. Again the practice of paying 'dakshina' (gift) to the 'Gurus' indicated the growth of a class of professional class of 'Gurus' among the vaishnavas.<sup>1</sup> "The reform movement was thus swamped by the old parasitical class, whose numbers were now definitely increased by the addition of non-Brahmins to their ranks."<sup>2</sup>

Another movement in the religious life of the Bengali Hindu in that age was the Vaishnava Sahajiyā cult which had a large body of followers. The post Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyās had many things in common with the pioneer movement. As to the origin of this cult, some trace it to Virabhadra, Nityananda and finally to Chaitanya while others trace it back to the Vrindavana Goswamins and Nityananda. The later Sahajiyās were also staunch worshippers of Chaitanya. "But the difference between the two was profound. While accepting the 'raganuga' ideal in common with the orthodox, the Sahajiyās completely

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

discarded the practice of 'Vaidhi bhakti' even for the meanest men. The only form of ritualistic devotion countenanced by the movement was a sort of esoteric sexo-yogic practice abhorred by the orthodox."<sup>1</sup>

Within Hinduism, another active force was the Sakta-Tantric cult. Though in our period it was anything but moribund, the bulk of Bengal's population followed this cult. This cult produced men of some eminence who still enjoy highest degree of respect in Bengal. Vaishnava movement and even the Sahajiya movement failed to dislodge the Sakta-Tantric cults from their pre-eminent position although the two former movements were more revolutionary in character. During the first half century of Mughal rule in Bengal, there was no fresh or any significant development in the 'Sakta-Tantric' cults.

The most essentials of Tantric worship were the 'Guru', the initiation (diksha) and the 'mantras'. These three forms of rituals were considered to be the lower form of Tantric worship. A higher form which only could lead the devotee to the ultimate object, that is consciousness of oneness with the Brahman or the Supreme-Being was identical with the yogic practice of 'Shatchakraveda'.<sup>2</sup>

One most important feature in the religious life of the Bengali Hindus in that age was the absence of toleration between the creeds and cults. The three major religious groups within Hinduism, viz. the Vaishnavas, the Sahajiyas and the Tantrics vied with one another for preminence and prestige. Religious bitterness and persecutions were not altogether unknown in that age. "Thus at least in theory, toleration was not the strong point of Bengali religious life in our period, at least so far as two major Hindu creeds were concerned."<sup>3</sup>

Besides the religious creeds mentioned above, the common people of Bengal had their own religious faiths and practices which were more tolerant than the proselytising Vaishnava and fanatical Tantrika. The less sophisticated Bengali developed their own religious practices and came to worship various gods and goddesses. Even they venerated the Muslim Saints and offered prayers at 'dargas'. And this is evident in the Bengali *Panchalis*. Reverence to a large number of gods and goddesses formed the chief features of Hindu religious belief in medieval Bengal. The Puranic deities continued to be worshipped as before. Of the deities worshipped by the common people mention

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.



may be made of Siva, Saraswati, Lakshmi and Ganesh. By the time of our period, the worship of Ganesh, Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga almost became regular annual festivities. The deities belonging to Sakta-Tantric cult like Bhavani, Kali, Mahamaya, etc. also received much attention. Along with these deities, the Vaishnava shrines and deities also formed important element in the folk religion of this period. Chaitanya came to occupy a place of highest respect in the pantheon of deities and worship of Gauranga became a regular feature in the folk religion of this period. "The numerous local deities were perhaps the most characteristic feature of medieval Bengali folk-religion."<sup>1</sup>

Such were the trends in the religious life of Bengali Hindus during our period.

**The State of Islam in Bengal.** Islam too experienced a new outlook as a result of Mughal conquest. Our knowledge of the state of Islam in our period is meagre. However, from the contemporary sources, we can form some idea of the state of Islam in the first half century of Mughal rule in Bengal.

With the gradual expansion of Mughal power in Bengal, a large number of cultured and educated Muslims from Upper India came to Bengal as officials of various ranks along with the subahdars. These upper-class and cultured Muslims gradually settled down in this province and thereby introduced into the local Muslim society the fresh breath of higher culture. As a matter of fact, after years of stagnation, Islam received fresh vigour and orientation in the wake of Mughal conquest and expansion. Dying spirit of Islam was revived. In a word, the Mughal conquest produced a great impact on the state of Islamic religion in Bengal during our period. With the establishment of a peaceful and regular administration in the province, came a large number of cultured Shias of Persia, scholars, physicians and traders. These immigrants enriched the Muslim society in Bengal in various ways. After the annexation of Bengal to the Mughal empire, a large number of wandering Muslim saints and preachers entered the province. The religious teachers, Sufi philosophers and mendicants considerably influenced the Muslim society and reoriented Islam in Bengal. "Muslim society in Bengal derived full advantage from this infusion of fresh light from the west. What the Vaishnava religion did for the Hindus of Bengal, was done for their Muslim neighbours by the Mughal conquest. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 225.

An important feature of Muslim religious life in medieval Bengal was the growing influence of Sufi mysticism. With the gradual consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal, a large number of Sufis belonging to various sects came to Bengal at different times. Several of the Sufi sects produced great impact not only on the people of the Islamic faith but also on the Bengali Hindus. Of the Sufi sects, the Chisti, Qalandars, Qadiriya and Naqshbandi sects were more numerous and popular with the Muslim society in Bengal. In the *Chandamangala* of Mukundarama, Qalandar mendicants are frequently mentioned. The noted mendicants of the Qalandari order were Shah Qamis, Abdur Razzaq and Alaol. The noted protagonist of the Naqshbandi sect was Shaikh Hamid Danishmand. All these sects had quite a considerable number of followers who preached the principles of their respective order not only among the followers of Islam but also among the lower-caste Hindus who were in the grip of superstition. These Islamic mystics established 'Dargahs' and 'khanqahs' deliberately on the sites of the ruined places of Hindu worship. "Hindus who had been accustomed for centuries to venerate these places gradually forgot their past history and easily transferred their allegiance to the pirs and ghazis." It cannot be denied that these Sufi mystics made inroads into Hindu society, particularly among the lower classes.

Another important feature of Islam in Bengal was the growth of another sect known by the popular name of 'Baul'. It cannot be gainsaid that this order was a by-product of the Sufi movement. According to some, this order took its origin in Nadia as early as the 16th century and hence it can be presumed that this sect was considerably influenced by the Vaishnava movement. It did not belong to any particular community neither it had any laws of religion or society. Like the Muslims, many Hindus also belonged to this mystic sect. Unlike the various Hindu and Muslim sects, the 'Bauls' could never organise themselves on any specific religious laws. In a word, they could not assume the role of an organised brotherhood.

Another noted feature of Islam in Bengal during our period was the growth of 'Guru-vada' among the followers of the faith. Certainly, this new development was the result of Sufi as well as Hindu influence. The similarity between the Vaishnava and Sufi movements, doubtless, brought the two major communities closer to each other and presumably the example of Hindu practices fell upon the enlightened and tolerant Muslims. In our period, both the communities shared each others' religious views and practices to a considerable extent.

The Sufi and Vaishnava movements considerably lessened the fanaticism among the Muslims. The medieval *Panchalis* refer to numerous Muslim saints and shrines of 'Pirs' venerated by the Hindus and Muslims alike. Offerings of food and lighting of candles at the shrines by the Muslims almost became a common feature. These practices and conversions to the faith of the infidel, no doubt, sullied the purity of Islam in Bengal. In the rural areas the Hindu and Muslim religious practices were so common that a clear cut distinction was not always possible. However, it would be wrong to suppose that Islam in Bengal lost its orthodoxy. Average Muslims carried on their religious pursuits according to the tenets of Islam without any serious deviation. Particularly, the upper-class Muslims still remained orthodox in their faith. "This orthodoxy tempered by popular practices and Hindu and Sufi thought seems to have been the key-note of Muslim religious life during our period."<sup>1</sup>

**Modes of Hindu life.** Except for the changes in Hindu social life due to the inroads of western influence, customs and manners, the average mode of living of the Bengali Hindus in our period was almost similar to that as seen to-day. Religion and conventions had great influence on the personal and social life of the Hindus. From birth to death, the course of a Hindu's life was regulated by a set of religious rituals whose violation was considered to be highly irreligious. From the time of the conception of a child onwards a series of rites were generally followed. While the child was in the mother's womb, the rites of 'Garbhadhana', 'Pumsavana', 'Simantonnayana', 'Soshantihoma', etc. were performed. These were all ante-natal rites. After the child was born, another set of rites were observed, viz. 'Jatakarma', 'Vridhdhisraddha', 'Shashthi' and the like. As it is to-day, the 'anna-prasana' or the first rice-taking by the child was an important ceremony.<sup>2</sup>

At the age of six or seven, the boy was sent to a Brahmin teacher or to a school for elementary education. After the boy had mastered the letters, he had to study grammar, classical poetry with commentaries, rhetoric and Nyaya. Discourses between the pupil and the teacher formed an important feature of the educational system of the time.

The Bengali *Panchalis* and other contemporary literature contain interesting details about Hindu marriage and family life. Early

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

marriage was in vogue. Economic factors generally never stood in the way of marriage. Eligibility of marriage for a youngman was not generally considered to be a problem as it is now. A man who remained un-married till twenty-five was considered an old bachelor. The girls were given in marriage between seven and ten. This was the normal practice. A girl of eleven was considered to be a fully matured youth and hence if the girls of this age-group were not given in marriage, their parents had to suffer social opprobrium. The system of receiving dowry ('Pan') was also in vogue in that age with this difference that the bride's side was not the bridegroom's side, as it is now, was the recipient. Non-acceptance of dowry on the part of the bride's side, was considered to be a highly pious act. Of course, system of giving dowry to the bride's father was more normal with the lower classes. "The songs of the Sun-god are full of pathos expressing sentiments of a girl whose father having received the 'pan' before an assembly was under the legal and moral obligations to allow her to be taken away by her husband at a tender age when she naturally longed for the society of her parents. The pathetic outbursts of feeling on such occasions give a true and unvarnished picture of a particular aspect of our society."<sup>1</sup> Like dowry to the bride's father, presents either in cash or in kind to the father of the bridegroom was also prevalent in that age. It is to be noted that the dowry system, as it is now, was never so wide-spread in those days. Monogamy was the normal practice, but polygamy was also not uncommon.

Owing to the marriage of girls before they attained puberty, parents had often to deplore untimely widowhood of their daughters. Widow-remarriage was never allowed in upper classes of Hindu society. The widows had to suffer terrible ordeals. They were not allowed to take part in social functions and their presence in social functions such as marriage, was considered inauspicious. The lot of the girl-widows was really pathetic. With the loss of their husbands they found themselves deprived of almost all the social privileges as enjoyed by the married women. The widows had to live in great austerity. As it is now, the widows in those days were forbidden to chew betels and to costumes and ornaments. Sometimes in their affection, the parents used to allow widow-daughters to use 'fag' (red powder), 'patsari' in substitution for vermilion and gold bracelets.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Das Gupta, *Aspects of Bengal Society*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Marriages were held as a fitting occasion by the well-to-do people for displaying their wealth and pomp. The ceremony would begin in the bridegroom's house attended by music, dance and ritual songs. In the evening, the bridegroom's party would start out for the bride's house in a gala procession. The marriage ceremony was almost the same as it is now. Even the socio-ethical ideas that influenced the family life do not seem to have undergone any fundamental change through the ages. They were almost the same as they are to-day. The joint-family system was prevalent in those days, though of course not with the same spirit as it existed in the 18th and 19th centuries. With few exceptions, the joint family life was not smooth and happy. Torture on new brides by the over-zealous mothers-in-law and husband's sisters was almost a normal feature of a joint family life. The permanent settlement of the worthless son-in-law in the father-in-law's house was also a common feature. As polygamy was also prevalent, the quarrels and constant bickerings between the co-wives made the family life miserable. Magic formulas and charms were often resorted to by the co-wives to gain the husband's affection and to dominate him. The women did not enjoy proprietary rights and hence they were completely dependent on their husbands. The widows were dependent on their sons. On the death of the father, the eldest son used to assume the mastery of the household and he had even the right to drive other brothers out. In anyway, the joint family life in those days was not normally sound nor based on any fixed principles.<sup>1</sup>

Manrique has left us a description of the Bengali Hindus, their manners and customs thus : "An Italian writer affirms in his writing that the Bengalis are of a white complexion and pompous and dainty in their way of living and dressing; but in this and other similar declarations, I shall not abide by him. . . what I shall tell will be the result of personal observation and long experience. Relying therefore on truth, I declare that the natives of Bengala has a brown complexion and that many are black like the Chingalas. They have a well-proportioned appearance of face and limbs and are of ordinary stature. The dress of the common people, men and women, is made of cotton-cloth without any tailoring. The men dress with 8 or 7 spans of cloth from the waist downwards, the upper part of their body remaining naked; they wear no shoes, their headdress is a turban, 12 or 14 spans

Manrique's  
accounts

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

long and 2 spans broad which in most parts will cost a quarter of a rupee. This is the dress of the common people. The more wealthy and important carry over their shoulder and on their back a piece of cloth of the same length mentioned above.

“The women wear cloth of the same material, but use a larger amount for generally they carry from 18 to 20 spans of it with which they cover their whole body. As a rule, the women have their arms covered with bracelets and rings. In their ears they wear large rings and similar ornaments; and in the nostrils, chiefly on the left side, they have a small ring of gold or silver and those who have means beautify them with one or two pearls. Their necks are also adorned with rings generally made of ‘gansa’, (kansa, white copper or brass). . . . Ladies of rank or wealth wear at the feasts and solemnities the same ornaments made of gold and set with valuable and precious stones. They also wear rings not only on their hands but also on their toes. . . . These are the jewels which are in use. They are made of gold, silver, ‘gansa’, ivory. . . . The dress of the women is generally of silk of all shades or of rich cloth interwoven with gold, silver and silk.

“On some occasions, men of rank and wealth put on drawers and ‘cabayas’ (long twine of muslin) after the mughal fashion. The only difference is in the ‘cabayas’ which are a kind of gown coming down to the middle of the leg. The difference which distinguishes at a glance the Moor from the Gentoos is that with Moors the gown opens to the right and with the Gentoos to the left. As for the drawers which they call ‘izar’ there is no difference; they are all narrow and very long. . . . The ordinary people are satisfied with wearing their cloth very clean and white.

“The Bengalis live generally in mud and clay houses which are very low and covered with straw or with palm leaves. As a rule, they keep their houses very clean and for this they besmear them frequently with cow-dung mixed with clay, not only the wells but the floor too and the place where they eat has to undergo the operation every day. . . . wives do not eat with their husbands but only after they have given them their food. The house furniture of the common people consists generally of a mat of straw on which they sleep and the cover is a blanket of cotton. . . . Their daily food is rice. . . they will eat with a little salt. . . some castes eat also herbs to which they give the general name of ‘xaga’ (green vege-

Dress of Hindu women

Bengali house

Food

tables) and those who can afford it make use also of milk, butter and other milky food. They partake of fish, but seldom, especially those who live in the interior. Now and then they eat the flesh of certain animals such as goats, kids, peacocks, turtle, doves and other similar kinds, but they will never touch the flesh of domestic pigs and fowls, eat eggs and other domestic animals and all they eschew the flesh of cows or bullocks. Among these infidels and heathens you find some sects more severe, whose followers not only never eat living things, but even herbs and vegetables of red colour. Because to eat the like they say 'boroguna' which means a great sin. This sect of idolators eat generally 'kachari' a dish of rice and of lentils. . . . At their banquets they prepare another kind of 'kachari' which they call 'guzarata' kachari, a more costly thing on account of the number of ingredients which enter into it such as almond, raisins, cloves, mace, cardamom, cinnamon and pepper. They also eat a number of sweets prepared after their fashion with a good quantity of butter. . . . The Bengali women are naturally of a desperate temper so much so that now and then they commit suicide by poisoning or hanging themselves. On the other hand, they are compassionate, charitable and very prone to hold as true whatever one wants them to believe and on this account they are more easily than the man converted into the true catholic faith."<sup>1</sup>

**The Modes of Muslim life.** The Muslim society was divided into four sections racially, viz. the Saiyads, the Mughals, the Afghans and the local inhabitants of Bengal. The society was again divided into castes according to professions as certain professions gradually became monopolised by the Muslims. Hence arose professional class, viz. 'Pithari' (Cake-seller), 'Kabari' (Fish-seller), 'Rangrej', (Cloth dyers), butcher and the like. Even the barbar among the Muslims came to assume the status of a class. It is to be noted that prior to the Mughal conquest the Muslim society that was in existence in the province, was never homogeneous as class distinctions among the Muslims began to grow. The primary distinction was between civil and military class who vied with one another for power and prominence. It was only after the permanent settlement of the Muslim conquerors, distribution of fiefs among the Muslim generals and soldiers and immigration of religious teachers and preachers that class divisions began to emerge although professional classes did not till then emerge as we find in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Manrique in Bengal, vide, Bengal—Past and Present*, 1916, pp. 3-16.

days of the Mughals. The Mughal generals and governors came to Bengal with a host of personnel from the highest officer to the meanest menials of different grades and naturally after their permanent settlement in the province, sharp class distinctions and professional classes emerged. By the time the Mughals consolidated their power in Bengal, the Muslim society was mainly divided into two classes economically—the upper class comprising the aristocrats and officers and the lower class comprising the peasants and the professional people noted above.

The Muslim aristocrats and officers lived in pomp and grandeur. Whenever they rode out, a host of menials in uniform accompanied them. Whenever the subahdars and high officials went out either on short or long journeys, they were followed by a magnificent train of elephants, cavaliers and infantrymen and a retinue of slaves and servants. The prosperous aristocrats always used in their journeys luxurious palanquins, horse-drawn carriages and musicians. As the dignity of an aristocrat much depended on the number of slaves in his possession, there was a constant competition among the nobles for maintaining as many slaves as possible. As a matter of fact, slavery did not imply any disgrace in those days; it was on the other hand, a source of pride to belong to a great man's household.

The Mughal aristocrats and officers used to live in spacious bungalows in the capital city. These mansions were mainly constructed with bamboos and wood of betel-nut trees. Normally these mansions were two-storied and sometimes three-storied. In the villages, the officers lived in mud-houses with thatched roof, the characteristic feature of Bengal architecture. Although the places of sojourn on the mansions of the aristocrats were not impressive from the architectural point of view, they lived in pomp and grandeur. The rich aristocrats had beautiful orchard, tank and even bath-rooms within their mansions. Some of them also had audience halls well decorated with carpets and cushions. Although the well-to-do Muslims used tools and benches, they generally preferred to sit on mats and carpets.<sup>1</sup>

The well-to-do Muslims used to wear costly dress "made of the finest cotton cloths, silver stuffs or gold and silver and of all the costliest things". Besides long 'cabayas', they used breeches and vests. They also used shoes "big and broad. . . ordinarily made of embroidered

<sup>1</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Op. cit.*, p. 200.



red leather". They also used costly turbans made of cotton or silk. Bejewelled caps were very common among the aristocrats. The Mullas used modest dress "all in white from head to foot". The Muslim ladies belonging to aristocrat families were fashionable in their dress which generally included "a big piece of very fine cotton cloth round their body, beginning at the waist and coming down to the ankles. Another piece of cloth either cotton or silk covered the upper part of the body. But the ladies, we are told, generally preferred white at home to go about bare-bodied down to the waist."<sup>1</sup> Ornaments of pearls and jewels were in use among the ladies of the upper class and they covered their arms upto the elbow profusely with ornaments of various designs. Ear-rings were very common both among the menfolk and womenfolk. Embroidered slippers without buckles were in use among both the sexes. Veils, both cotton and silken, were in use among the ladies.

The upper-class Muslim always maintained a certain standard of etiquette and manners which have been praised by the foreigners. To each other, they maintained certain formalities. Their social behaviours in certain aspects were doubtless, superior to those of the Hindus. A matter of fact, in course of time the upper class Hindus adopted some of the social manners and etiquette of the Muslims. In a private or social gathering, the upper class Muslims used to "speak in a very low voice, with much order, moderation, gravity and sweetness.... Often they speak into each other's ear and then they put the end of their shoulder-sash or their right hand in front of their mouth, for fear of inconveniencing each other with their breath." Visitors were entertained with much civility and the same was shown at the time of departure.

Idl-fitr, Induzzoha and Muharram were the principal religious festivities of the Muslims in Bengal. Besides they used to celebrate the king's birth-day in a befitting manner. Nawroz or the New Year's Day was also another religious festival. The Idl-fitr was observed on a grand scale amidst songs, dances and other kinds of games. The Muharram was celebrated in almost the same way as it is now. The Muharram used to create such a frenzy among the participants that the Hindus out of fear used to keep themselves indoor on the occasions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

The upper class Muslims took particular care in educating their children. The mosques and makhtabs were the centres of learning. The Mullas performed the duties of teachers besides their religious duties. Along with reading and writing, the children had to study the Quran with much care. After completing the study of Quran, the children had to study certain particular subjects like rhetoric, philosophy, poetry, medicine, etc. Education was less prevalent among the poor whose children took to service either as menials or soldiers.

Polygamy and debauchery was a normal feature in the upper class Muslims. Prostitutes were frequent in the upper class families. In social gatherings or banquet, the host used to treat the guest with such entertainments. The well-to-do Muslims used to maintain harems where girls of various age-groups were kept. The social status of a noble depended much on the number of concubines in his harem. Love affairs sometimes leading to murder were a common feature. Divorce was in vogue. The husband could murder his wife for adultery with impunity. Of course, the wife also could secure divorce from her husband if she could prove before the local Qazi that the husband did not provide her with maintenance. Dissolution of marriage lowered the status of the woman in the society and hence it was not much frequent.

Pilgrimage was widely prevalent in those days. Some did it purely from religious point of view, while others did it as a means of penance for the vile crimes committed by them. The author of the *Baharistan* has referred to a woman who took a vow to make twenty-one pilgrimage to Mecca on foot. This lady was indirectly responsible for the death of a young man with whom she was in love. Within a few days of that tragic incident, an Abyssinian taking the helpless situation of the lady destroyed her virginity by force. The lady became furious and by a stratagem she murdered the Abyssinian, and a few of the friends of the Abyssinian. Later she was given in marriage to a young man. But as her virginity was already lost, she, instead of sharing the bed with her husband, purchased a virgin maid and prevailed upon her to share the bed of her husband. The husband in a state of intoxication could not recognise the maid and destroyed her virginity. The maid began to grow jealous and said that as her virginity had been taken away, she would not leave her master to the lady. The latter in a state of rage caught hold of her (the maid's) neck and twisted her neck in such a way that she instantly died. These tragic incidents one after

another made the lady so much repented that she decided to make a pilgrimage on foot in the name of each of the persons, she killed so that God might make the deceased souls favourably disposed towards her and she might be atoned for her sins.<sup>1</sup> A person returned from Mecca after pilgrimage, was given an honoured position in the society. In fact, the Muslims in those days attached a great importance to pilgrimage to Mecca which poor persons could not afford to do.

About the activities of the Mullas, Manrique writes : "In this city (Dacca) . . . they (Mullas) are the ordinary expounders of the Quran; they also cut the throat of all the animals used for food, so that in places where there is a Mulla, people think it a great imperfection to slaughter the animals for the sustenance. These aforesaid Mullas, together with some 'darweshes' who lived retired from the world and enjoyed the reputation of 'pirs' or saints, managed with the help of the chief wife of the Nawab to raise a persecution (cry) against the non-religious in the hope of expelling them. For the sake, they greatly roused the fears of people, preaching to them that God would punish them (Muslims) if they allowed these 'Kafirs' or men without religion, to live among the Mussalmans, the chosen people of God. The persecution would have been carried out openly, had not the fathers enjoyed the favour of the Padisha and, therefore, that of the Nawab."<sup>2</sup>

**Economic Conditions.** Prior to the coming of the Mughals in Bengal, the general condition of the Bengalis, so far as can be gleaned from Old Bengali literature, seems to have been on the whole prosperous. But there was poverty for a section of the people while another section was enjoying enough plenty. This was due to class relations and occasional misrule that prevailed.

Great changes in the economic sphere came in with the gradual conquest and consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal. Bengal, in fact, passed through a stage of economic transformation during the first half century of Mughal rule. The interesting feature of this economic transformation was the introduction of European trade and commerce in Bengal. Their introduction of bullion gave an impetus to the growth of Bengal's over-sea trade. During the Turko-Afghan rule, the products of Bengal both agricultural and manufactured, could be sold for money only to a very limited extent as the only buyers of these products were a few Chinese, Arabs and Portuguese. Besides, Bengal had limited costal trade with Orissa and some parts of

<sup>1</sup> *Baharistan, I*, pp. 264-268.

<sup>2</sup> *Manrique in Bengal, vide, Bengal—Past and Present*, 1916, pp. 3-4.

Madras. For internal trade, barter was the usual practice. In terms of money, prices were exceedingly low. But the "huge influx of silver effected a sudden and profound change in Bengal's economy. . . . Again by providing Bengal with an universally accepted medium of exchange, the European traders enabled us to buy the products of other provinces and countries to an extent inconceivable in the earlier times, when barter was the chief method of our trade."<sup>1</sup>

Further, the European traders gave a great impetus to industrial production in Bengal. Bengal was a great market for saltpetre, cotton goods, silk yarn and indigo. The European traders stood ready with cash in hands for any quantity of these goods that the manufacturers and agriculturists could offer. These Europeans also organised and developed Bengal's industrial production with a view to make the industries more efficient. "By their chain of agents at every mart, by their system of advances (dadan) to the workmen, by their setting up of workshops for Indian labourers in their factories and by their bringing out from England dyers and 'twist-throwers' who taught the indigenous artisans better methods—they raised Bengal's industrial production to a higher level of quantity, besides immensely increasing its quality."<sup>2</sup> Bernier has written that "The Dutch have sometimes 7 or 8 hundred natives employed in their silk factory at Kasimbazar where in like manner the English and other merchants employ a proportionate number. . . ." This participation of the Europeans in Bengal's trade and industry almost revolutionised Bengal's economy.

Another important feature of Bengal's economy during this period was the foundation of European settlements at Chinsura, Calcutta and Chandernagar which broke Bengal's economic and cultural isolation.

### *Economic Conditions of Bengal as Described by the Europeans (A General Review)*

A general economic condition of Bengal during the one and a half century of Mughal rule can be learnt from the writings of the European travellers. A host of European travellers and traders who visited Bengal during this period were very much impressed by the fertility of soil, abundance of food-stuff and natural resources of the province. Varieties of Bengal products, silk, cotton, green vegetables and other

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal, II*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

food stuffs and their cheapness, and commercial prospects of the province very much impressed and encouraged the European travellers and traders.

Bowrey has described Bengal as one of the largest and most potent kingdoms of India containing a circuit no less than English miles blessed with as many as five rivers that issue out into the sea or the Gulf of Bengal, the whole extent of the gulf being about 300 miles, and together with many other conveniences, the kingdom of Bengal became most flourishing and famous. Upon the banks of the great rivers of the Ganges stood many prosperous villages where cotton, lacca, honey, beewax, butter, rice, and many other beneficial commodities were abundant which were sufficient "to satisfy this and many other kingdoms".<sup>1</sup> Bowrey has made special mention of trade, commerce and the trading centres of Bengal. In his words, "Many great and small ships belonging to the English, the Dutch and Portuguese do annually load and transport sundry commodities hence and great commerce goes on into most parts of account in India, Persia, Arabia, China and South Seas. . . . One of the most admirable arms of the Ganges is Hughli river. Up and down the same, a very considerable merchandise is drove and very beneficial, especially to the English and Dutch nations, having excellent conveniences for carrying their European commodities up into the inland towns and cities and the like for bringing down the commodities in this or some other kingdoms. The town (Hughli) is not very uniform, but is very good ancient place inhabited with some of the richest persons of the kingdom and all sorts of commodities of Orissa, Bengala and Pattana. . . are here daily to be bought and sold in the public bazar. . . . Cassimbazar is a very famous and pleasant town, famous in many respects, first and chiefly for its great commerce and plenty of very rich merchants, the only market place in this kingdom for all commodities. . . . All the salt-petre is sent from Pattana to Hughli in great flat-bottomed vessels of an exceeding strength which are called 'patellas', each of them will bring down 4, 5, 6 thousand Bengala maunds. Many patellas come down from Pattana yearly laden with wheat and other grain and go up laden with salt and bees-wax. . . . From Dacca the chief commodities brought to England are fine 'cosses' (cotton cloth used in India) commonly called 'muzling (muslin). . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Bowrey's  
accounts

<sup>1</sup> Bowrey, *Countries round the Bay of Bengal, (1669-79)*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Bernier in his accounts writes: "All ages have spoken of Egypt as one of the best and fruit-fullest parts of the world and writers will not grant, there is any country comparable to it; but as far as I can see by two voyages I have made in the kingdom of Bengal, I am of opinion that advantage rather belongs to it (Bengal) than to Egypt. It bears rice in such abundance that it not only furnishes its neighbours but many very remote parts. It is carried up the Ganges to Patna and it is transported by sea to Masulipatam and to many other ports of the coasts of Coromandel. Besides, it (rice) is sent away in the foreign kingdoms principally into Ceylon and Maldives. Further it (Bengal) also abounds in sugar, so that it furnishes with it the kingdoms of Golkonda. . . Arabia also and Mesopotamia are thence provided with it by the way of Mecca and Bassara. . . It is true that the country of Bengal yields not so much corn as Egypt, but if that be a defect, it is imputed to its inhabitants that eat very little bread and much more rice than the Egyptians, yet it always bears which is sufficient for the country and to afford excellent biscuits, very cheap for the provision of our European ships. . . And for a rupee which is about half a 'crown', you may have twenty good pullets or more, geese and duck in proportion. . . There is also plenty of many sorts of fish both fresh and salt and in a word, Bengal is a country abounding in all things and it is for this very reason that so many Portuguese and other Christians are fled thither from these quarters which the Dutch have taken from them. . . It is this affluence of all those things necessary for life, joined to the beauty and good humour of the women natives that hath occasioned this proverb amongst the Portuguese, English and Hollanders, viz. that there are an hundred open gates to enter into the kingdom of Bengal and not one to come away again. As to the commodities of great value and which draw the commerce of strangers thither, I know not whether there be a country in the world that affords more and greater variety; for besides the sugar I have spoken of, which may be numbered amongst the commodities of value, there is such store of cotton and silks that it may be said that Bengal is, as it were, the general magazine thereof, not only for Hindusthan or the empire of the great Mogol, but also for all the circumjacent kingdoms and for Europe itself. I have sometimes stood amazed at the vast quantity of cotton cloth of all sorts, fine and others, tinged and white which the Hollanders alone draw from thence and transport into many places especially into Japan and Europe. . . The like may be said of the silks and

Bernier's  
accounts

silk-stuffs of all sorts. . . It is also in Bengal, where the prodigious quantity of salt-petre is found which is so conveniently carried down to river Ganges from Patna where the English and Dutch load whole ships full for many places of the Indies and for Europe. Lastly in Bengal, whence good lacca, opium, wax, long pepper do come and even butter is to be had there in so great plenty that though it be a gross commodity, yet notwithstanding it is thence transported into diverse places. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Manrique observing on the food-stuffs and their cheapness, writes: “The food-stuffs are also most abundant especially wheat, rice, vegetables, sugar, butter, oils of different kinds, not the olive oil however and many sorts of meats of domesticated and of wild animals. The rice here is far better than the European one, especially the scented variety, for besides being very fine and of a most agreeable flavour, it has after being cooked a nice smell which one would think a blending of several scents. All these supplies are very cheap since a ‘candil’ (roughly 500 lbs) of rice might cost three or almost four rupees. One ‘cantaro’ (roughly 150 lbs) of butter sells at almost for two rupees. . . . As regards flesh-meat, in many places you can get a cow for 3 or 4 ‘reals’; (a cow for rupee one or less and 25 fowls for rupees 2) from 20 to 25 fowls for one ‘peso’ and all the rest accordingly. Venegards do not exist in Bengala and therefore wine from grapes is not to be found except wine imported from Portugal. A liquor made from rice takes its place here. . . . No less marvellous is the abundant supply of implements and eatables. Anything man desires can wish for is to be found there, especially in the numerous bazars or markets. I would wonder there at the sight of the quantity and variety of fowls and wild birds, all of them sold alive and so cheap that it was like giving them away for nothing. . . .” Dwelling on Bengal’s trade and manufacture, Manriques writes: “All these kingdoms of Bengala are much visited and resorted to by many foreigners on account of the good traffic which is carried on in food-stuffs and also in cloth. The traffic in food-stuffs are loaded only with rice, oils, wax, sugar, butter and other similar goods. The greater amount of cloth is made of cotton and is of a more delicate and beautiful texture than can be found anywhere else. It is in these countries, too, that they manufacture the most delicate and valuable muslin pieces, 50 or 60 yards in

Manrique’s  
accounts

<sup>1</sup> Bernier, *Voyages I*, pp. 189-191.

length and 7 or 8 palms in breadth with the extremities embroidered in gold, silver and coloured silk. These muslins are so delicate that the merchants carry them in bamboo pipes two ordinary spans long and in this way they take them to Khurasan, Persia, Turkey and many other parts.”<sup>1</sup>

Of the exquisite fineness of the Dacca muslins much has been written. “In this same country (Dacca)”, runs one of the earliest accounts of them, “they make cotton garments in so extraordinary a manner that nowhere else are the like to be seen. These garments are for the most part round and woven to that degree of fineness that they may be drawn through a ring of middling size.” Tavernier relates that a turban of 60 cubits in length of a muslim is so fine that “you would scarcely know what it was that you had in your hand.” Various kinds and various sizes of muslins were manufactured in Dacca and some of them were given figurative names indicative of their exquisite texture. Bradley writes: “The Ab-i-rawan or Running Water and the Shabnam or Evening Dew, were some of the most highly prized, while no less beautiful were the Jam dani, flowered muslin, and the Malmal Khas, the King’s muslin. For transparency, fineness and delicacy of workmanship, these fabrics have never been equalled and not all the improvements in the art of manufacture in modern times have been able to approach them. Yet the implements used by the weavers at their work were primitive in the extreme. They consisted only of pieces of bamboo or reeds roughly tied together with thread and so laborious was the process of manufacture that it is said that one hundred and twenty instruments were necessary to convert the raw material into the finest fabrics such as the Ab-i-rawan. Infinite care and skill were demanded and the strain on the eyesight was so great that it was only between the ages of 16 and 30 that weavers could be employed on the finest work. The excellence of their muslins was largely attributed by the Dacca weavers to the peculiar dampness of the climate and they were careful not to work in the middle of the day lest the heat of the sun might affect them.”<sup>2</sup> Most of the European and other foreign travellers have spoken highly of the Dacca muslins and they were really amazed with the exquisite fineness of the Dacca muslins.

<sup>1</sup> *Manrique in Bengal*, vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, pp. 117-18.



The European travellers have left us a general account of trade and commerce of Bengal during the hey-days of the Mughal emperors.

They have described the flourishing ports of Bengal in details with the commodities both agricultural and manufactured. **General trade and commerce** Dacca, Murshidabad, Kasimbazar, Hughli in Bengal, Patna in Bihar and Pipli in Orissa were among the most flourishing trade centres of Bengal in those days. Traders from various parts of the world as well as those of other parts of India flocked to these ports to buy Bengal goods in large quantities. By the end of the 17th century the English and the Dutch had established themselves in the province as trading nations and they, doubtless, contributed much to the industrial productions of the province. Moreover the European traders boosted up the movement of merchandise both in the internal and over-sea trade.

Pipli in Orissa was formerly a place of brisk trade and the English and the Dutch had factories there. It produced the same commodities as did Balasore. But with the growth of Calcutta on the bank of the river Hughli towards the end of the 17th century, Pipli lost its commercial importance. With the beginning of the 18th century Calcutta began to assume commercial importance. At the primitive stage of its development, Calcutta was a market town for corn, coarse cloth, butter and oil and other production of the country. The English trade and commerce in Calcutta at the beginning, was greatly hampered by the existence of a number of "troublesome rajahs whose territories lay on the bank of the Ganges between Patna and Cassimbazar, who pretended to tax on all goods and merchandise that passed by or through their dominions on the river and often raised forces to compel payment. The colony (at Calcutta) has very little manufacture of its own, for the government being pretty arbitrary, discourages ingenuity and industry in the populace. . . ."<sup>1</sup> The port of Pipli was formerly a colony of the Portuguese. "This town", writes Hamilton, "drives a great trade because all foreign goods are brought thither for import and all goods of the product of Bengal are brought thither for exportation. . . . It affords rich cargoes for 50 or 60 yearly, besides what is carried to the neighbouring countries in small vessels and there are vessels that bring salt-patre from Patna. . . . Opium, long pepper and jinger are commodities, that the trading ships in India deals in, besides tobacco and many sorts of piece goods that are not merchantable in Europe. . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, *New Account of the East India, II.*

Cassimbazar is about 200 miles above Hughli where the English and the Dutch have their respective factories. . . . The town is large and much frequented by merchants which never fail of making a place rich. The country about it is healthy and fruitful and produces industrious people who cultivate many valuable things. . . . Patna is the next town frequented by Europeans where the English and the Dutch have factories for salt-petre and raw-silk. It produces also so much opium that it serves all the countries in India with the commodity. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Most of the European travellers have spoken highly of Dacca as the largest city and the most flourishing port of Bengal in the hey-days of the Mughal rule. Dwelling on Dacca in the day of Shaista Khan, Bradley writes: “It was a time of prosperity in Dacca hitherto unknown. The number and variety of things exported at this period are sufficient evidence of its flourishing condition. To almost every country of the world Dacca sent her produce. . . . Through this busy mart (Surat) Dacca carried on a great trade in cloth and although chauks and tortoise-shell were taken in exchange, the balance of trade lay so greatly in her favour that it was necessary to import specie directly which accounts for the appearance of Aroct-rupee in Eastern Bengal. Tavernier visiting the city in 1666 found ‘cossas muslin, silk and cotton stuffs and flowered or embroidered fabrics’ being exported in large quantities to Provence, Italy and Langudoe. To Bhutan, Assam and Siam went coral, amber and tortoise shell; to Nepal large quantities of cloth, skins and shell bracelets; to the Coromandel coast, rice, which sold in Dacca at the extraordinary rate of 640 lb. to the rupee. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Before the coming of the Europeans, barter was the usual mode of exchange in trade and commercial transactions. Coins were few and were not the normal medium of exchange. Within the province barter somehow served the purpose. But the foreign traders besides “goods for goods”, preferred also coins. And naturally the shortage of convenient medium hampered the external trade of the province. This difficulty was removed by the Europeans whose trade brought huge quantities of silver into the country and passed the money on to the Bengali peasants and artisans. Dwelling on the difficulty of the trade-exchange Master writes : “. . . financing the trade was always a complicated and difficult matter for the chief of the factories owing

Introduction of  
bullion in Bengal  
trade

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Bradley, *Op. cit.*, pp. 115-16.

to the conditions obtaining in the regions in which the company worked. Each chief had to depend upon his finance on the prices he obtained in money which he could pay out, for his bullion, both gold and silver and for his merchandise. This required as much judgement, local knowledge and acuteness in bargaining as did the purchase of his goods for Europe, and was open to the same risks of loss from bad faith on the part of buyers. The silver was partly in bars and partly in Mexican and Spanish dollars and gold chiefly in coins (European and Indian) such as 'pistoles' and 'mohurs', etc. Sending bullion to the local mints to be coined was not resorted to if it could be avoided and practically only when a sufficient price for it could not be secured in the market. Sometimes bullion, gold especially, was not locally saleable at all. . . . The necessity of securing bullion for cash, the difficulty of assessing its value, the great variety in the quantity of current money, the difference between the numerous local exchanges and the violent fluctuations in price in which bullion was liable in countries where it was scarce and of uncertain quality, kept the question of exchange ever before the minds of those responsible for the Company's trade. . . ."<sup>1</sup> It cannot be gainsaid that the European traders, by providing the province with universally accepted medium of exchange, enabled the local traders to buy the products of other provinces and countries "to an extent inconceivable in the earlier times when barter was the chief method of our trade."<sup>2</sup> It is true that by the introduction of bullion, money prices and moneywages rose up from the middle of the 17th century. Of course, it is to be admitted that in spite of the rise in money prices, the real wages of labour did not rise proportionately. "The upper classes of our society certainly grew richer and came to possess more articles of luxury than before and the Government officials and revenue-collecting middle-men made money on a very larger scale than in Akbar's days."<sup>3</sup>

### *Social life of Bengal during the Nawabi regime*

"In every age and clime, almost all the great movements in world's history have been influenced by social and economic factors."<sup>4</sup> It is really interesting to know the social and economic conditions of the people of Bengal during the regime of the Nawabs of Bengal from

<sup>1</sup> *Master's Diary*, I, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> K. K. Datta, *Studies in the History of Bengal Subah*, p. 8.

Murshid Kuli Khan to Mir Kasim. As a whole, the social and economic picture of the province was not so encouraging as has been supposed by some of our modern researchers. The picture of the Bengalis as drawn by the author of the *Riyaz* can hardly be regarded as overdrawn. In the words of the author of the *Riyaz* : "At this time the people in Bengal were sunk in the abyss of moral debasement and cankers of dark ingratitude and treachery, untruthfulness and venality had crept into the vitals of their hearts."<sup>1</sup> In fact, social degeneration and economic bankruptcy encouraged and helped the ambitious English traders and officials of the East India Company to supplant the rule of the Nawabs in Bengal. At the root of the easy English success whether at Plassey or at Buxar, the social and economic factors were no less insignificant along with political factors.

During the period under review, the match-makers came to play a great role in Hindu marriage. As a matter of fact, a professional class of match-makers grew up in the Hindu society who played an important role in finding suitable bridegrooms or brides for the parents and in settling the marriage terms. And for this work, they were amply rewarded. These match-makers as directed by the parents used to move from place to place, settled the terms of marriage and then made arrangements for a formal meeting between the guardians of the would-be couple. On most occasions a formal deed of contract between the two sides was made which was called 'Lagnapatra'. The marriage was celebrated at the house of the bride. The nuptial tie was regarded highly sacred and religious by the upper classes of Hindu society. "So the parents of both the bridegroom and the bride regarded it as their first and foremost duty to propitiate the Gods and their departed forefathers by offering worship and by performing 'Sradha' ceremonies on the marriage day. . . The bridegroom was dressed with a 'mukuta' on his head with fine and costly apparel on his person with garlands of flowers round his neck and with sandal-paste, musk, etc. rubbed on his face. On the marriage day, the bridegroom had to remain without food till the ceremony was over."<sup>2</sup> The marriage celebration was almost the same in those days as it is today among the Hindu Bengalis.

The boys and girls were given in marriage in their early ages. According to the laws of religion, the girls were to be given in marriage

<sup>1</sup> *Riyaz*, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> Datta, *Op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

before they attained the age of puberty. And this aspect of Hindu marriage specially attracted the European visitors and writers, Craufurd might well write: "The Hindus are so scrupulous with respect to the virginity of their brides that they marry extremely young, although consummation is deferred till they marry a person with whom those symptoms have already appeared to which the sex is subject."<sup>1</sup> Scrafton has observed: "They are married in their infancy and consummate at 14 on the male side and 10 or 11 on the female side and it is common to see a woman of 12 with a child in her arms. Though barren women are some among them, yet they bear but few children, for at 18 their beauty is on the decline and at 25 they are strongly marked with age."<sup>2</sup> Scrafton's observation cannot be accepted wholly. As a matter of fact the girls had very little choice of their husbands. The parents or guardians had the sole authority and say in the matter. Due to the prevalence of 'Kulinism' in the Hindu society, many evils had crept in. Kulinism was wide-spread both among the Brahmins and Kayasthas. One great evil of this system was that in many cases the couples were not well-matched. Kulinism had such an influence on the society that sometimes well-read and accomplished girls were given in marriage to a person ill-equipped and unaccomplished. Sometimes again young and charming girls were given in marriage to old and sometimes even to blind persons. Again sometimes a boy of 12 or 13 was matched with a girl of matured youth. The customs of the 'kulins' were very narrow and rigid. "The kulins used their pedigrees as means of bettering their fortune and felt no scruple in relaxing the rigidity of their rules in the case of a wealthy man though the latter might be of an inferior descent. Marriages in kulin families could never be celebrated peacefully; disputes and quarrels were to originate on some question or other."<sup>3</sup> Kulinism resulted in polygamy and in every marriage the kulins had to be offered dowry. Stavorinus, dwelling on 'kulinism' writes that "the evils of kulinism and polygamy were more shocking among the Brahmins than (among) the other castes".<sup>4</sup> Another great evil of kulinism was that as the kulins were in the habit of marrying a good many girls, the latter had very little contact with their husbands and they mostly spent their days in their father's house in a miserable condition. Moreover, the kulins were also in the habit of

<sup>1</sup> Craufurd, *Sketches Chiefly Relating to*, etc., p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Scrafton, *Reflections*, etc. pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Datta, *Op cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East*, I, p. 440.

exacting their dues from their parents time and again which led often to serious troubles between the two families. Among the non-kulins, the dowry system was not compulsory and among the lower classes, the system of paying dowry to the bride's parents was in vogue.

Dwelling on the position of women in the society, Dow writes: "Women are so sacred in India that even the common soldiery leave them unmolested in the midst of slaughter and devastation. The Harem is a sanctuary against all the licentiousness of victory and ruffians covered with the blood of a husband, shrink back with confusion from the secret apartments of his wives."<sup>1</sup>

Position of  
women

But the assertion of Dow does not seem to be correct so far as the period under review is concerned and more especially when the Hindu women fell victims in the hands of Muslim invaders or aggressors. Verelst has observed that "throughout the East, women are wholly subject to the will of their masters and every husband is the avenger of his own wrongs".<sup>2</sup> The husband regarded his wife as his property. The wives were wholly dependent on their husbands and the widows on their sons. The women were kept confined within the limits of their houses and were not allowed to go out without the consent of their male guardians. Verelst writes: "...the confinement of women is a law that cannot be changed. Throughout India, the practice most certainly prevails and is closely connected with the manner and religion of the people. The Hindu no less than the Mohomedan dreads the exposal of his women as the worst dishonour".<sup>3</sup> The women were expected to be modest and gentle in their habits and dealings with others. Although dependence of the women on their male guardians was the general rule, sometimes they could rise above this state of dependence and could act independently of their male guardians. In those days, the women could take serious part in politics as well as in general administration of the estates entrusted to their care. The names of Rani Bhavani; Maharani Vishnukumari, mother of Kirtichandra of Burdwan, Jayadurga Chaudhurani; the Begum of Alivardi Khan and many may be mentioned in this connection. Rani Bhawani has been described as "heroine among the Bengalees", whose name has become a by-word for charity and generosity. She was an able administrator too and managed the estate of her deceased husband well. Jayadurga Chaudhurani was a

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Verelst, *View of the Rise, Progress, etc.*, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

woman—zamindar like Rani Bhavani. She once headed a rebellion against Devi Simha, the oppressive zamindar of Rungpur. There are instances of Muslim women too who equally played a prominent part in politics of the time. There is a remarkable incident illustrating that Muslim ladies in India had not yet all taken to the existing form of seclusion nor ceased to take an active part in their husband's burdens, both in peace and war. It is interesting to note that Alivardi's Begum played the role of supreme political officer whilst her husband fought the battle with the Marathas. The author of the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* writes that Nawab Shujuddin's Begum Zebunnisa played an active part in the government of her husband. It was she who invested Alivardi Khan with a 'Khelat' and with the patent for the deputy-nazim of Bihar. There was another remarkable character amongst the Muslim women who took an active part in political and military affairs. And she was Dardenah Begum, the wife of Rustam Jang, the governor of Orissa. The author of the *Riyaz* writes: "The exhortations of Doordaneh Begum, the wife of Murshid Kuli (Rustam Jang) the Governor of Orissa, to fight against Alivardi as well as the appearance of the Begum of Alivardi with Alivardi on the battlefield show that the Muhammadan ladies also took part in politics and state affairs, and that they had not all succumbed to the prevalent form of seclusion. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Bharatchandra has referred to the art of music cultivated by the women of Bengal in those days. The cultivation of this art was mostly confined in the upper class and well-to-do families. The women played on musical instruments and the instruments popularly used were 'vina,' 'rabab,' 'tanpura,' 'mandira' and 'saptaswara' (a kind of lute).

A Hindu wife in a joint family had to perform a number of duties. She was to look after the comforts of other members of the family, to bring up the children and to cook and serve food to all the members. Male-cook was seldom found in a Hindu family. "She had her duties not only to her husband but also to each and every member of her family and a husband who regarded his wife as an object of personal enjoyment and comfort only, was looked upon as violating the sacred ties of a joint family."<sup>2</sup>

The practice of 'Sati' (a wife burning herself on the funeral pyre of her husband) was widely in vogue in those days. The contemporary European writers have referred to it widely. In the words of Bolts: "Even those very women who live sequestered from the world and of

<sup>1</sup> *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, p. 330, F.N. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Datta, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

course are inexperienced in such difficulties and misfortunes as served to fortify the mind and heart or such distress as will render life irksome or impel to desperation, often manifest such fortitude as amazes Europeans but to hear of, in the horrid deaths which they voluntarily brave, of burning alive with the dead bodies of their husbands in funeral pyres.”<sup>1</sup> The courage and fortitude with which the Hindu widows offered themselves to be burnt alive on the pyres of their husbands wondered the foreign travellers. As Stavorinus writes that the widow “underwent everything with the greatest intrepidity and her countenance seemed at times to be animated with pleasure even at the moment when she was ascending the fatal pile”.<sup>2</sup> The performance of ‘Sati’ was considered to be a highly sacred thing in the Hindu society—and it was also considered to be a highly glorious deed for a Hindu widow. Craufurd writes, “such is the influence of customs and the sense of shame that a woman of the highest birth will undergo this awful sacrifice with as much fortitude and composure as ever were exhibited by any hero or philosopher of antiquity.”<sup>3</sup> According to Scrafton the practice of ‘Sati’ was only performed by the widows of illustrious families. But Stavorinus has referred to this practice prevalent among some castes. Referring to the practice of ‘Sati’, Tavernier writes : “It is an ancient custom among the Indians that the husband happening to die, the wife can never marry again. So that as soon as the man is dead, the wife retires to bewail her husband. All the rest of her life she lives slighted and despised and in a worse condition than a slave in the very house where she was mistress before. This unfortunate condition curse them to hate life, so that they rather chose to be buried alive with the body of their deceased husbands than to live in the scorn and contempt of the world. Besides that, the Brahmins make them believe that in dying after that manner they shall survive again with their husband in another world with more honour and more advantages than they enjoyed before. These are the motives that persuade the women to burn themselves with their husbands; besides that the priests flatter them with a hope that while they are in the midst of the flames, before they expire, Rama will appear and reveal wonderful visions to them that after their souls have transmigrated into various bodies, they shall at length obtain a high degree of honour to eternity. . . . Before the women that is to be burnt, goes the music

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<sup>1</sup> Bolts, *Considerations*, etc., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Stavorinus, *Op. cit.*, I, p. 449.

<sup>3</sup> Craufurd, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 16.



consisting of drums, flutes and hautboys whom the women in her best account follows, dancing up to the very funeral pile upon which she gets up and places herself and they then lay across her the body of her husband. She ties up all she has got fidding them to set fire to the pile which is presently done by the Brahmins and her kindred. I have observed, because there is scarcity of wood in Bengala that when these poor creatures are half griddled, they cast their bodies into the Ganges where the remains are devoured by the crocodiles. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Education was not widely spread in those days in Bengal nor there was any organised system of education. State patronage to education was almost absent. It depended mostly on private initiative, mostly undertaken by the local landlords or ‘Rajas’. It was under the patronage of the zamindars of Burdwan, Natore and Nadia that most of the valuable literary works of this period were accomplished. Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia was a great patron of Sanskrit learning and the Raja used to spend rupees 200 per month as stipends to the scholars and students studying in the ‘tols’ of Nadia. The eminent scholar of Bengal, Bharatchandra, composed his *Anandamangala* under the patronage of Raja Krishnachandra. Under the patronage of Raja Yosovanta of Burdwan, Rameswara composed his *Sivayana*. As a matter of fact, even the lesser landlords were not idle in this respect. Many zamindars of Bengal had distinguished themselves for the cultivation of learning in the province.

Sanskrit was the normal medium of instruction in the ‘tols’ and ‘chatuspathis’ where the Hindus used to receive their higher education. Most of the principal towns and cities had ‘tols’ and ‘chatuspathis’. Burdwan and Nadia had the largest number of these institutions for higher studies. These institutions were cosmopolitan in nature and attracted scholars and students from various parts of India. A Sanskrit scholar had to pass through different stages. At the elementary stage he had to master the letters; next he had to undertake the study of grammer. The next three higher stages were the study of ‘alankara’, ‘naya’ (logic) and philosophy.

Along with the cultivation of Sanskrit learning, learning in vernacular literature and language also steadily progressed. In the Bengali literature of the time two names stand out very prominent, viz. Bharatchandra at Nadia and Rameswara at Burdwan. Among

<sup>1</sup> *Tavernier's Travels in India*, pp. 407-10.

others the names of Ramagati Sena, the writer of *Mayatimira-chandrika*, Jayanarayan and Anandamayi the joint writers of *Harilila* may be mentioned. The *Chandikavya* was independently composed by Jayanarayan. Among the lesser writers of vernacular literature mention may be made of Dwija Parasurama, Krishnadas, Narottano Das, Dwija Ramkrishna, Krishnadas Kaviraja, etc.

Primary education in vernacular was generally imported in the village 'pathsalas' where, besides Bengali literature and language, the students received elementary knowledge in arithmetic and natural sciences. Dwelling on the primary education in Bengal, Craufurd writes: "There are schools in all the towns and principal villages. The masters are Brahmans. The place where the boys are taught is generally a pandel or a room made of leaves and leaves of the palm trees. The boy sits on mats on the floor. The books are of leaves. Those who write hold in the left hand the book and in the other a steel bodkin with which they make a slight impression on the leaf. But they frequently begin by making letters and figures with their finger on sand spread on the floor and sometimes learn to calculate with small shells and pebbles."<sup>1</sup> Adam writes in his Second report on education in Bengal thus: "The only other written composition used in these schools and that only in the way of oral dictation by the master, consists of a few of the rhyming arithmetical rules of Subhankara, a writer whose name is as familiar in Bengal as that of Cocker in England without anyone knowing who or what he was or when he lived. It may be inferred that he lived or if not a real personage, that the rhymes leaving that name were composed before the establishment of British rule in this country and during the existence of the Musalman power, for they are full of Hindustani or Persian terms and contain references to Muhammadan usages without the remotest allusion to English practices or modes of calculation."<sup>2</sup> It would be wrong to suppose that in the village 'pathsalas' only in Bengali literature and language education was imparted. In one and the same 'pathsala' along with Bengali, Persian and Arabic were also taught although for the Muslim boys and girls there was 'maktabs' in the villages where there was sufficient number of Muslim inhabitants. A renowned Muslim educationist of the time Samaser Ghazi in his school called Tolbkhana made arrangements for teaching Arabic and Persian to the Muslim boys and Bengali to the Hindu boys. In course of time with the gradual decline of

<sup>1</sup> Craufurd, *Op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Datta, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

Muslim patronage, Muslim boys adopted Bengali as their vernacular and gradually Bengali became the mother tongue of the majority of the Muslims. It cannot be doubted that vernacular education in Bengal was wide-spread and primary education was given much encouragement in the society. Besides the educational institutions mentioned above, there were other channels which served the purpose of making the masses enlightened and these were religious songs, popular tales and comic-ballads. The masses used to receive ethical, aesthetic and intellectual tastes through these popular channels.

The noted centres of Sanskrit learning in Bengal were Nadia, Vansaveria, Triveni, Kumarhatta, Bhadreswar, Jayanagar and Bali. Of these, Nadia was by far the premier centre of Sanskrit learning. "In truth Nadiya was the focus of intellectual development, the land of the 'Naiyayikas' who reasoned and argued on every conceivable topic, the abode of astronomers whose 'panjikas' and almanacs still regulate the festivals and 'pujas' and the daily domestic concerns of the Hindus." There were about 14 colleges in Vansaveria and 12 colleges in Bali where 'nyaya' philosophical works were exclusively studied.

As Persian was the language of the rulers, it almost assumed the status of official language. Persian was the only medium through which the Muslims used to receive their education and for the sake of securing official patronage as well as government jobs many Hindus also had to master this language. The noted Hindu scholars of the time like Ramaprasad Sena, Bharatchandra, Ramachandra Munsî and Narasimha Basu mastered this language. The author of the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* writes that "Raja Kyretchand having some knowledge of grammer and syntax wrote Persian more correctly and more elegantly than falls to the lot of Gentoos (Hindus)". The Nawabs of Bengal appointed those Hindus to government posts who had sufficient knowledge of Persian. The Nawabs and the Muslim nobles were patrons of Persian language and literature. Of the Persian scholars flourished in the courts of Nawabs of Bengal, mention may be made of Maulavi Nassyr, Daud Ali Khan, Maulavi Muhammad Arif, Haiat Beg, Sayad-alim-Ullah, Kazi Ghulam Muzaffar, etc. As Nadia was the chief centres of Sanskrit learning, Patna was the chief centre of Persian learning. In the words of Ghulam Husain, the author of the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, "There were in those days at Azimabad number of persons who loved science and learning and employed themselves in teaching and in being taught, and I remember to have seen in that

Persian  
education

city and its environs nine or ten professors of repute and three or four hundred students and disciples whence may be conjectured the number of those that must have been in the great towns or the districts. Among those that flourished in the towns of Behar, the Kazi Gulam Muzaffar, better known under the title of Muzafar Ali Khan, was personally known to Allavardi who appointed him to the office of supreme judge of Murshidabad.”<sup>1</sup>

The education imparted through Persian generally included Persian language, literature, theology, astrology, medicine and science. Still it can be asserted that the general standard of Persian education was not up to the mark. Dwelling on the state of Muslim education, Scrafton writes: “Till the age of five or six, the boys of rank and family are left entirely to the eunuchs and women and from the fondness and tenderness of their management they first acquire a delicacy of constitution, a timidity and early tendency to the pleasures of the seraglio. They are then provided with tutors to teach them the Persian and Arabic languages; and at this early age, they are brought into company where they are taught to behave with great gravity and circumspection, to curb every motion of impatience, learn all the punctilious ceremonies of the eastern courts, to say their prayer in public and every devotion of exterior and it is astonishing to see how well a boy of eight or nine years old will acquit himself in company. They are also taught to ride and the use of arms and are furnished with their shield and sabre and a little dagger at their waist which is called cuttary. . . when the hours of school and company are past, they return to the seraglio and the parents never scruple to admit them to all their plays and diversions. . . The slaves and women of the seraglio wait with impatience the first appearance of desire to debauch them, unknown to the parents and this manner of education continues till thirteen or fourteen then they consummate their marriages which are made by their parents in their infancy and a separate household is formed for them.”<sup>2</sup>

For the boys and girls of the general Muslims the mosques and ‘imambarahs’ were the centres of learning. These institutions maintained teachers of Persian and Arabic. In the places where the Muslims were predominant, ‘maktabs’ for higher studies grew up. It is to be noted that in the field of education the Muslim teachers and professors put much emphasis on theological studies rather than

<sup>1</sup> *Siyar*, II, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Scrafton, *Op. cit.*, pp. 20-23.

on secular studies. And this naturally hindered an overall growth of education among the Muslims.

Dresses and ornaments varied amongst the different classes in Bengal. Class distinction was easily visible in dresses. The rich generally used silk dresses, handkerchiefs and 'shawals', "some wear shawls while others are in want of a piece of torn cloth." Shirts were in use and the rich used 'phoenix feathers' in their dresses.

As regards phoenix feathers, the author of the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* writes: "This was the name given by the Hindus to the Birds of paradise which the Dutch imported from the Moluccas with feathers and all." Dwelling on the dresses of men and women, the author of the *Siyar* writes: "There is so little difference between the Hindustany (i.e. the Muslim) dress of men and women that save the turban, it requires the eye of skill and experience to state that difference and this consists in general in the 'chola' or close coat, which is much higher with women than with men; in the 'daman' or petticoat tacked to it, which is four times ampler in a woman than in man; and lastly in the lining of the hem, which is always in white with men, but of the most gaudy silks with women and those too adorned with lace."<sup>1</sup>

The general dress of the middle-class people consisted of a piece of cotton cloth and a piece of 'dobaja' during the hot season and during the winter season they used an additional piece of cotton cloth called 'dohar'. 'Mirjai' and turban were also in use during the winter. Leather slipper as well as wooden-slippers were in general use. The Brahmins and the priests generally used wooden slippers. Craufurd has referred to "slippers of fine woollen cloth or velvet which frequently are embroidered with gold or silver; and those of princes at great ceremonies even with precious stones."<sup>2</sup> A piece of white cotton cloth commonly called 'chadara' was used above the shoulder by the middle class men. The rich and the aristocrats used a piece of super-fine cotton cloth embroidered with gold or silver or a piece of silk cloth on their shoulders. Craufurd has also referred to 'jama' "neatly shaped to the upper part of the body, falling very full from thence and extending so low as almost entirely to cover the feet." 'Jama' was also in use among the Muslims. High officers and distinguished persons used a kind of close vest of fine-worked muslin over the 'jama'. On particular occasions like ceremonies or festivities, the rich "put on

<sup>1</sup> *Siyar*, II, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Craufurd, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

rich bracelets on their arms and jewels on their turbans and strings of pearls round their necks hanging down upon the breast."<sup>1</sup> On the occasion of attending the Nawab's court, the nobles and the big zamindars wore special dresses characterised by a turban adorned with diamonds and other precious jems and by belts fastened over the skirt in various fashion.<sup>2</sup> Even their attending servants put on a rich dress. The dress of the scholars was very simple.

The women of the middle class family generally used one piece of cotton cloth called 'sari' and in the winter another piece of cloth to cover their bodies. The same was the dress of the women of the poor classes, the only difference was the quality of the cloth. The women of the well-to-do families put on rich dresses which consisted of different kinds of fine cotton or silk cloths. Sometimes their 'sarīs' were embroidered with gold or silver. Close jacket and 'kanchuli' or bust-bodies were also in use among the women of the rich families. 'Ornas' and bust-bodies of various colours were widely in use among them as Craufurd writes: "A wide piece of 'muslin' is thrown over the left shoulder, which passing under the right arm is crossed round the middle and being fastened by tucking part of it under the piece of cloth that is wrapped round the loins, hangs down to the feet."<sup>3</sup> In the words of Baharatchandra: "They (women) covered their breasts carved out of wood with 'kanchulis and their bellies made high with linen were covered with 'ghagras' (skirts)."<sup>4</sup>

Gold and silver ornaments were in use among the women. The women belonging to the middle class families used 'nath' and 'vesara' on the nose. They adorned their ears by various kinds of earrings such as 'kundala', 'nala-jhumka', 'pasa', etc. "All the women put on beautiful clothes and gold ornaments, beautiful shells, ivory and gold bangles and 'bajus' (armlets) and tassels of wonderful make on their arms." Young ladies used anklets or 'nupuras' for the feet. Gold rings and gold necklaces of various designs were used by the women of the well-to-do families. The women belonging to the poor families also used ornaments, of course not of gold, but of silver and other inferior metals. Stavorinus has referred to a kind of ornament used by the women of the poor classes "made of a sort of cowrices, brought from the Maldivé islands".

<sup>1</sup> Datta, *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Craufurd, *Op. cit.*, II, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Vide, Datta, *Op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

*Economic Condition of Bengal during the Nawabi R2gime (A General Survey)*

The period of the Nawabi rule over Bengal witnessed the working of a new force which certainly transformed Bengal's economic life and that force was the vast sea-borne trade carried on by the European companies. The internal peace and security that the Nawabs maintained in Bengal favoured the expansion of foreign as well as internal trade in the subah. There was an all-out improvement in the economic condition of Bengal. During the early part of the Mughal imperial rule over the province, its trade and commerce suffered great diminution due to constant imperial warfares and raids and plunders carried on almost incessantly by the Magh and Portuguese free-booters. These had serious consequences on the economic progress of the province. Moreover the position of the European traders remained unsettled for a considerable time which affected the importation of bullion in Bengal which only boosted up the purchasing power of the people of the province. It was only after the suppression of the Maghs in 1666 and the establishment of the three European settlements at Calcutta, Chandernagar and Chinsura towards the end of the 17th century that Bengal witnessed a period of economic progress and prosperity. With the progress of trade and commerce as well as with the development of better communications Bengal's economic isolation broke down. Closer contact between Bengal and the rest of India became possible and hence Bengal's products grew to be popular in the rest of India.

Communications within a country by both land and water play an important role in the economic life of the people and as a matter of fact to understand the economic condition of a country it is necessary to understand the state of its communications. It cannot be doubted that the state of communications in Bengal in the 18th century was well suited for commercial purposes. In that age the whole of Bengal was covered with a network of roads. Not only Calcutta, Dacca, Patna and Murshidabad were well connected by roads with Bhutan, Nepal, Sylhet, Bih4r, but also places like Burdwan which was not so important as a commercial centre like the four cities mentioned above had important land routes running from and to other parts of the country. Not only the important trading centres had good roads but also a single district was intersected by many roads within it. Even the remotest parts of the province had good roads within them as well as had connecting links with the distant capital cities.

But eastern Bengal and more particularly the tract lying east of Dacca had no good land routes and it was the numerous rivers and rivulets that intersected the interior of eastern Bengal. As Rennel has observed : "After leaving Barraset, we seldom found the roads good, they being excessive narrow, rough and crooked and very frequently running across paddy fields so that when the ground is ploughed there are no traces of roads to be found."<sup>1</sup>

Like land routes, Bengal had good water routes as well. In the words of Rennel: "The Ganges and Burrampooter (Brahmaputra) rivers together with their numerous branches and adjuncts, intersected the country of Bengal in such a variety of directions as to form the most complete and easy inland navigation that can be conceived. So equally and admirably diffused are those natural canals over a country that approaches nearly to a perfect plane, that, after excepting the lands contiguous to Burdwan, Birbhum, etc. which may be reckoned a sixth part of Bengal, we may safely pronounce, that every other part of the country, has, even in the dry season, some navigable stream within 25 miles at farthest, and more commonly within a third part of that distance. It is supposed that this inland navigation gives constant employment to 30,000 boatmen. Nor will be wondered at, when it is known that all the salt and a large proportion of the food consumed by ten millions of people are conveyed by water within the kingdom of Bengal and its dependencies. To these must be added, the transport of the commercial exports and imports, probably to the amount of two millions sterling per annum; the interchange of manufactures and products throughout the whole country; the fisheries and the articles of travelling."<sup>2</sup>

Besides the two main river routes through the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the numerous tributary rivers and creeks running almost through every part of eastern Bengal served as excellent means of communications as well as afforded excellent means for trade and commerce. Dwelling on the commercial importance on these tributary rivers and creeks, Rennel writes : "The kingdom of Bengal, particularly the Eastern front is naturally the most convenient for trade within itself of any country in the world. . ."<sup>3</sup> Stavorinus writes: "The country is everywhere intersected with large and broad channels which all run into the Ganges. All merchandise is conveyed, by

<sup>1</sup> Rennel, *Journals*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> Rennel, *Memoir of the Map of Indostan*, pp. 245-46.

<sup>3</sup> Vide, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1933.



means of these passages, with great facility, from one place to other, throughout the land and the chief branches of the river communicate hereby with each other. . . . Among these channels, there are some which are wide and deep enough, to be navigable for large ships.”

Hence it can be reasonably said that there was no lack of proper communications throughout the province in that age. As Dow has observed: “The easy communication by water from place to place, facilitated a mercantile intercourse among the inhabitants. Every village has its canal, every parganah its rivers and the whole kingdom the Ganges, which falling by various mouths, into Bay of Bengal lay open the ocean for the export of commodities and manufacturers.”<sup>1</sup>

According to some scholars, the lack of proper communications made the Bengal villages economically isolated and independent in that age. But this view does not appear to be wholly true. The economic isolation of Bengal villages was really not due to lack of good communications. It was so due to political uncertainties of the time. With the decline of the central imperial government, the province became the hunting ground of the Maghs and Portuguese free-booters and the Maratha raiders. This had serious repercussions on trade and commerce. “Perhaps it was the necessity”, writes Dr. K. K. Datta, “for the defence against these dangers, the fear of losing their merchandise in the hands of the plunderers or brigands and the dimensions that the tolls had reached, together with the extortions and corruptions in the internal trade that drove the village within its shell and fostered internal cohesion and unity within it. Commerce came to be monopolised by only those who could withstand such dangers and the poor villagers had to remain satisfied within the limits of their villages accepting only ‘dandans’ and suffering for that.”<sup>2</sup> Probably the economic isolation of Bengal villages was due to the weakness of the Nawabs’ government, the frequent raids and ravages of the Maghs, the Marathas and other bandits and grasping habits of the company’s native servants.

As has been said earlier that the Europeans gave a great impetus to industrial development in Bengal. Bengal was a vast market for salt-petre, cotton goods, silk yarn and indigo. The province produced cloth of all sorts, most beautiful muslins, silk, raw and worked. There was much demand for Bengal manufactures in the markets of England and

Manufactures  
and industries

<sup>1</sup> Dow, *Hindoostan*, I, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Datta, *Op. cit.*, pp. 410-11.

other European countries as well as Asiatic countries. The foreign buyers stood ready to purchase any quantity that Bengal's peasants and artisans could offer. Although agriculture formed the main occupation of the bulk of the people, they at leisure applied themselves to the loom. Hence agriculture and manufacture flourished side by side in Bengal. The European exporters organised Bengal's industrial production with a view to making it more efficient and economical as they used to export much of the province's industrial productions. Dwelling on Bengal's manufactures, Pattulo had observed that "no nation on the globe can either equal or rival them."

The Bengal weavers manufactured silk and cotton cloths of various qualities. Santipur, Kasimbazar, Malda, Khirpai, Radhanagar, Burdwan, Baranagar were the principal centres of cotton and silk piece-goods. But Dacca occupied the premier position in the manufacture of fine 'muslins' and cotton cloth of varied species. Almost every village of the Dacca district manufactured 'muslin' and other kind of silk goods. Rennel has observed that Dacca had "a vast trade in muslins; and manufactures the most delicate one, among those that are so much sought after in Europe." Dacca manufactured cloths of various sizes and qualities "ranging from the fine gossamer muslin, the attire of the inmates of the zenanas of the native princes, down to coarse thick wrapper worn by the poor ryot." About the fineness of the muslins, Stavoninus writes: "Muslins are sometimes woven so fine that a piece of 20 yards in length and longer can be enclosed in a common pocket tobacco box. The whole is done with a very trifling apparatus and Europeans are surprised to behold the perfection of manufacture which is exemplified here in almost every handicraft, effected with so few and such imperfect tools."

Besides cotton and silk cloths and piece-goods, Bengal also manufactured during this period carpets, jute cloths and sugar on a wide scale. Bengal exported sugar to the different Asiatic countries and it provided employment to a considerable number of Bengali peasants. Bengal also manufactured guns, boats and ice.

Upto the middle of the 18th century, Bengal's two industries, cotton and silk, earned much reputation and they provided employment to a considerable section of the Bengalis. But since the days of Nawab Alivardi Khan, decline of these two premier industries as well as economic degeneration of the province began. The Maratha invasions which almost became chronic in the days of Alivardi Khan did much harm to Bengal's flourishing industries. The oppressions and grasping

habits of the Company's servants were no less responsible for the decline. Besides these factors, the decline was due to prevailing political disorder which had begun long before the battle of Plassey and which continued for a pretty long time after Plassey. Dwelling on the economic decline of the province, Rennel wrote in 1765 : "We may easily account for its decline, by the continual wars which have of late years wasted the whole country and in the fomenting of which we have had too large a share."<sup>1</sup>

Agriculture, doubtless, played the vital role in the economic life of the people of those days as it is still to-day. Dwelling on the importance of agriculture in the life of the people of Bengal, Dow has observed thus : "Agriculture constitutes the wealth of every state not merely commercial. Bengal, a kingdom of 600 miles in length and 300 in breadth, is composed of one vast plain in the most fertile soil in the world. Watered by many navigable rivers, inhabited by 15 millions of industrious people, capable of producing provisions for double the number as appears from the deserts which oppression had made, it seems marked out by hand of nature, as the most advantageous region of the earth for agriculture."<sup>2</sup> Observing on the flourishing state of agriculture in Bengal, Orme writes : "Rice which makes the greater part of their food is produced in such plenty in the lower parts of the province, that it is often sold at the rate of two pounds for a farthing; a number of other arable grains, and a still greater variety of fruits and culinary vegetables, as well as the spices of their diet, are raised as wanted, with equal ease; sugar, although requiring more attentive cultivation, thrives everywhere."<sup>3</sup> The chief agricultural products were wheat, paddy, rabi crops, sugarcane, tobacco, etc. Bengal not only produced sufficient food for home consumption but also exported a sufficient quantity to various other countries within and outside India. Bengal rice and wheat were even exported in large quantity to Kashmir and Tibet in exchange for gold and wool.

Although Bengal was extremely rich in agricultural products, the condition of the peasants was not at all satisfactory. Most of them earned their livelihood by tilling the lands of the big landowners. The few who had land of their own abandoned cultivation in times of political storms or foreign invasions like the Maratha invasions. The

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Datta, *Op.cit.*, p. 439.

<sup>2</sup> Dow, *Hindustan*, I, p. cxxxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Orme, *Military Transactions*, etc., II. p. 4.

agriculturists were generally poor and could not even purchase the basic implements for cultivation. It was only Nawab Alivardi Khan who patronised the peasants and thereby succeeded to a considerable extent in improving their condition. He did much to protect them from the hands of the money-lenders to whom most of the Bengal peasants and even their sons and daughters were mortgaged. It is difficult to ascertain exactly the extent of agricultural lands that passed into the hands of the money-lenders.

## CHAPTER 15

### BENGAL'S NAVAL TRADITIONS

“A people that can feel no pride in its past history and literature, loses the mainstay of its national character,”—says Max Muller. Bengal had glorious naval traditions and the Bengalis played a very prominent part in the maritime and colonising activities. Races do not become martial by birth alone. They become brave otherwise according to the condition under which they live and the training they receive. Dexterity in naval (colonial or maritime) activity is acquired by those who generally live near to the sea and navigable rivers and no wonder, that the Bengalis, particularly those of South and Eastern Bengal acquired the fame of being a maritime people from the earliest times. Nearness to the sea and the spirit of adventure made the Bengalis a sea-going people and widely known both within and outside India even before the Christian era.

The naval activities of the Bengalis are well depicted through literature, paintings, architecture and inscriptions. The poets, Narayandeva and Banidas, Ketakadas and Khamananda composed many verses and poems indicating Bengal's maritime activities. Also in the writings of foreigners like Megasthenese, Strabo, Virgil, Ptolemy, we come across references to naval enterprise of the Bengalis, although the information supplied by them are very scanty. The Bengalis in that remotest days went out of their geographical bounds, braving the perils of the sea, in pursuit of trade and religion and sometimes in quest of territories.

Of the manufacturing industries, boat industry and building of sea-going vessels occupied an important place in Bengal. The proverbial merchant Chand-Saodagar, as it is related in the *Marasamangala*, summoned his master-craftsman named Kusai and asked him to build 14 vessels forthwith. The story goes that Kusai went with many apprentices under his care to the forest and cut down all kinds of trees for building the various parts of the boats. Some three or four lakhs of planks were hewed out which were afterwards joined together by means of iron nails.<sup>1</sup> We come across references to sea-going

Early naval exploits of the Bengalis

Early references

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<sup>1</sup> Mukherjee, *Indian Shipping*, p. 222.

vessels and their component parts, viz. helms, and oars, instrument for baling out water, ropes both for towing, and fixing it to a wooden post on the lands, sails, mast and wheels in the early Bengali *Charyapadas*. Ferry-boats were in use and the charges had to be paid by means of 'cowries'.<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions of the Palas and the Senas of Bengal, we come across the words like 'Naobut', i.e. fleet of boats.

The boats had more poetical names in those days than now. In the *Manasamangala* we find such names as 'Gangaprasad', 'Sagarfena', 'Hansabar,' 'Rajhansa', 'Udayatara', 'Sankhachura' and the like. The chief ship of a merchant-flotilla was well decorated and was called 'Madhukara'. In the earlier days these ships were of huge size. It is said that the ship which carried prince Vijaya to Ceylon was so large as to accommodate 700 passengers. It is again said that the mast of Chand-Saodagar's vessel was so high that sitting on its top "one could see the kingdom of Ravan from Bengal." In certain vessels Chand-Saodagar opened bazars and in others dances were performed by girls brought from Tamilnad. In the *Chandimangala* we find an account of the fleet of the merchant Dhanapati, 100 yards in length and 20 yards in breadth "with prows shapped like 'makara'."<sup>2</sup>

The *Eastern Bengal Ballads* contain many descriptions of sea-voyages and a merchant is reported to have said that "Sea is our home". In another place in the Ballads, a wife of a merchant is reported to have said thus, "our marriages and other social rites are performed on boats".<sup>3</sup>

The river system and the sea-coast, doubtless, facilitated the growth of Bengal's commerce and industries. The role of the rivers and other waterways in the economic life of Bengal cannot be under-estimated. Doubtless, in all ages, the city that controlled the mouth of the Ganges was commercially the most flourishing in Bengal. For instance Tamralipta was a most flourishing city and a port down almost the end of the Hindu period. The same is true regarding Satgaon till the end of the 16th century and then Hughli and finally Calcutta. The noted commercial emporium and sea-borne trade centres of Bengal were Tamralipta (in ancient times), Satgaon and Sonargaon (in middle ages). In a country covered with a network of rivers and rivulets, under-

<sup>1</sup> Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, I, p. 617.

<sup>2</sup> Mukherjee, *Indian Shipping*, p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Sen, *Brihat Banga*, I, p. 471.

standably, boats must have been the principal means of conveyance and the boats not only helped trade and commerce but also constituted a great military strength of the Bengalis. In the ancient times, the war-vessels were called 'naobut' and the admiral was called 'tarik'. The bridge of boats was called 'naokaneelak' and the dock was called 'nabataksheni'.

The 'kumauli' inscription of Baiçyadeva contains descriptions of naval warfare. From an inscription found at Khandagiri in Orissa, we know that along with other trainings, the princes of Kalinga received training in naval warfare as well. Doubtless, the people of Bengal and particularly those of the coastal region acquired great dexterity in naval battles.<sup>1</sup> "It was the Bengalis", writes Daw "who founded the Kalinga empire whence they spread their conquests beyond the seas and colonised Java and other islands of the Indian Architeclago." Bengal's flotilla visited China, Japan and the Bengali colonisers helped in the establishment of the Chola kingdom in the south. In the inscriptions of the Palas and the Senas, we come across the words like 'nac but'. The military strength of these two dynasties depended much on their fleet. Upto the closing days of Pala supremacy, Bengal's naval power remained undiminished. Dharmapala (770-810 A.D.) had a well-furnished fleet and in the Kalimpur copper-plate inscription of Dharmapala there is a reference to a bridge of boats built for the purpose of transporting soldiers. In the war between Kumarapala (1120-1125 A.D.) and the Utakalraj, Bengal's fleet played a prominent role. Somewhere in Southern Bengal this engagement took place. Vijaya Sena (1095-1158 A.D.) had a large fleet at his command. We are told in the Deopara inscription that "Vijayasena's fleet in its play of conquest of the dominions in the west advanced along the course of the Ganges."

Although we come across references to naval battles in that remote age, very little is known of the naval organisation. From the 'Harsha' inscription we come to know that the inhabitants of Gaur called 'Kai-bartas' were renowned for their dexterity in naval warfare and land was assigned to them for their maintenance. The sailors and mariners were recruited on a temporary basis in times of war. Despite the fact that our information regarding Bengal's naval strength and its organisation in ancient days is scanty, it cannot be denied that "Bengal is the maker of Neo-India. . . .An unwritten chapter in the history of

<sup>1</sup> Schoff, *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, p. 245.

modern India in the record of what has been done for the people by men of Indian race and in that record a commanding share has fallen to Bengal.”<sup>1</sup>

**Bengali merchants.** Besides the kings and princes of Bengal of the ancient days, Bengal's merchants also played a conspicuous part in Bengal's naval and maritime enterprise. “The Bengalees are said to be constitutionally timid, yet they evince a spirit of enterprise in their ordinary pursuits and avocation which is hardly consistent with imputation,” observed T. Young, Secretary, Mechanics Institute, Bombay, a few years ago. Doubtless, with the advent of the Europeans, the Bengalis degenerated in their maritime activities and became timorous and inexpert in the art of navigation and the reasons are not far to seek. The folk literature and the Ballads written and sung mostly during the Muslim period will bear ample testimony to the opulence and influence enjoyed by the Bengali merchants in the society. These Ballads sometimes seem to be fictions, but a great mass of historical information regarding old Bengali trade, social status of the Bengali merchants and the various religious rites performed by the housewives of the merchants concerning maritime voyages can also be gleaned through them.

The merchants who mostly lived on trade, visited distant countries like Java, Sumatra, China and Japan and sometimes proceeded as far as Scotland and Russia in their country-made boats. It is mentioned in old Bengali literature that the merchants possessed “a fleet of thousand ships”. Of course, we should not put much reliance on this report regarding the number, but it is certain that the merchants possessed a fair number of boats well manned, well-decorated and well-equipped. Their sea-going boats bore fascinating names and picturesque shapes. We have references to much boats as ‘madhukaras’ which were the show-ships boarded by the merchants themselves with their personal staff. The ‘mayurpankhi’ and the ‘sankhapankhi’ types of boats were after the names of particular birds. The ‘mayurpankhis’ were the most fashionable boats not only of the ancients but also of the following generations and we find them existing in the time of the Mughals. Fascinating names and fascinating shapes of the boats of the Bengal's merchants, doubtless, fascinated the Mughals right from Babur. This is now an established fact that the merchants of Bengal carried the bird peacock to Babylon and

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Daily News' Special Commissioner.*



other western countries to which it was unknown in the 6th century B.C.<sup>1</sup>

The merchants usually carried sails of various colours and patterns, cords and ropes, anchors and bamboo poles, etc. Provisions for a half a year were at least stored. Bows and arrows, guns and gun-powder were taken in abundance in order to protect themselves against the sea-rovers who were numerous as well as against the grasping habits of the native princes and zamindars through whose territorial waters they used to pass.

Incidentally the observance of certain rites were considered indispensable for a merchant before embarkation. On the eve of the merchant's voyage for different shores, the wife used to wait on her husband with a golden vessel full of water and wash his feet and then wipe them with her unbraided locks. The whole courtyard was decorated with 'alpana' paintings and the house bore a festive appearance. Although these traditions lie enshrouded in obscurity owing to Indians having ceased for a long time to travel by sea, some of these parting rites and ceremonies are still persisting in most of our Indian homes. The most essential thing for the merchant before embarkation to do was to have his wife's full consent to his undertaking and the "captain refused to set sail to the ship until and unless his master obtained her permission. It should be said that the captain ventured to do so, because all this was held responsible from a religious point of view."<sup>2</sup> The prows of the ships had to be painted with red powder, sandal paste and vermilion and the outward flanks of the ships oiled before sailing. In the case of a son undertaking the voyage, the father whether Hindu or Moslem, placed his hand on his son's head and blessed him a hundred times invoking God's blessings for his son's safe voyage. The merchant's friends and relations assembled at the 'ghat' to bid him adieu. The trumpet sounded and 'ply on' was the word on all sides. The anchor was carried to the ship and the sailors cried 'badar', i.e. invoking the help of a 'pir' or saint to make the voyage successful and comfortable.

Besides the merchant-vessels, the big merchants also possessed war-vessels and in the event of war they carried 14 ships. "The ship named 'forkan' went ahead, it had in it a library of the Koran and its commentaries. Next went the ship on the board of which was the merchant himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Folk Literature*, p. 65.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

The third ship the 'kalyan' carried guns and cannon and the fourth the 'kanchanmala' had a store of ammunition of gunpowder and bullets. Then came the ship 'guadhori' on board of which were the splendid retinue and soldiers. The sixth ship 'hansanad' contained men armed with 'lathies'. The North-western sepoys (the Pathans) were on board the ship 'shyamal-shundar.' The ship 'hangar' (the shark) carried the instruments of war music, the big drums and tabors. The ninth ship called the 'khaiapati' was filled with lathies made of bamboos. . . . The next ship 'rangmala' had in it swords and daggers. The ship 'hakchar' contained a store of food that would last for 6 months. The next one, the 'ant-baul' carried many tons of very fine rice and the 'hurmer' was fitted with tanks containing drinking water. The last of all 'lakshi-dhar' was manned by the captain himself. The 14 ships marched with great uproar and the drums and horns sounded a note of war which deafened the ear."<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that in the Ballads we often come across the merchants having 14 ships in their possession. The humble number of 14 ships "seems to be" as D. C. Sen has observed, "a more rational number which we may believe."<sup>2</sup> But in the case of the abovenoted 14 ships of war, D. C. Sen has observed further that the names of the 14 ships and a full account of the cargo are interesting and do not look like fiction. It is interesting to note that the flag-ship of the Moslems generally carried the Koran and other scriptures."<sup>3</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Bengali merchants usually possessed vessels ranging from 5 to 100 for commercial purposes.

Every wealthy merchant had a captain and sometimes more than one, whose duty it was to collect rowers and sailors before embarkation and they were kept in service, throughout the year. From July to March the merchants usually undertook voyages, moving from port to port, returning home before April. The rest of the three months were not considered safe for sea-voyages. And during this slack period, their main concern was to re-fit the ships, store up provisions for the next voyage. So it is evident that the wealthy merchants spent most of the days of the year in their ships wandering about foreign lands for trade.

As there were farewell rites and ceremonies on the eve of embarkation, so also certain rites were performed to welcome the merchants

<sup>1</sup> *Eastern Ballad, II*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

on their home-coming. Their wives and other female members of the family accorded to the merchant a hearty-reception by singing songs of welcome and performed certain ceremonies to sanctify the occasion and that was done on the landing 'ghat'. "A flat basket with sacred articles chiefly blades of grass and handful of rice were first offered to the goddess 'Vana-durga' and then they invoked hymns in honour of Padma (Manasa-Devi). The women welcomed the captain with cries of victory."<sup>1</sup>

The merchants of Bengal in that age delighted in their commercial pursuits and took a great pride in their profession. In the then society, they commanded great prestige. A king's son and a wealthy merchant's son were always good friends. When a princess was to be married, her choice invariably fell on a prince or a merchant's son as her bridegroom. Although there seems to be many exaggerations about the merchants in the folk literature, it cannot be gainsaid that the mercantile community of Bengal once commanded a great respect in the society.

Hence it would be reasonable to suppose that Bengal and the Bengalis had glorious tradition of naval and maritime activities in the ancient days. These traditions continued even in the middle ages although not so glorious as in the past. During the first half century of the Mughal rule in Bengal, the independent and semi-independent landlords of Bengal, popularly known as 'Bhuiyas' had naval establishments of their own and it was their naval superiority that obstructed the progress of the imperial arms in the beginning particularly in the riverine tracts of Bengal. Most of the principal Bhuiyas of Bengal, namely Isa Khan, Kedar Rai, Musa Khan and Pratapaditya possessed numerous war-boats and naval armaments. Of these 'Bhuiyas', Raja Pratapaditya secured an ascendancy in respect of war-boats and naval establishments.

**Raja Pratapaditya's Navy.** The *Baharistan* and the travel-diary of Abdul Latif—all testify to his martial strength particularly in war-boats. It was the onward march of the Mughals from the north-west in the beginning of the 17th century, the incursions of the Maghs and Feringhi pirates from the south-east and the natural thirst for conquest that prompted Pratapaditya to organise a naval department on a grand scale. It does not appear that Pratapaditya utilized his naval power for commercial purposes as done by Raja Pramananda of Bakla in the mid-16th century.

<sup>1</sup> *Eastern Ballads, III*, p. xiv.

Pratapaditya had the advantage of building boats of various sizes. There was no dearth of wood for constructing boats in the Sundarbans. Of the oaks, 'Sundari' oak is by far the best for the purpose. It is thick, red-coloured, strong and capable of supporting heavy loads. It is more lasting in water than teak wood. Pratap had the least difficulty in procuring this wood for the purpose of building his war-boats. A few types of boats were the characteristics of Jessore such as 'dingi', 'pansi', 'bachari' and 'balam'. A schedule caste people having the title of 'bachar' are still living in old Jessore. The war-vessels of Pratap included 'gurab', 'kosa', 'galvat' and 'balam'. Of these 'gurabs' were larger in size and heavily built. In the war with the Mughals, these vessels proved to be the cause of Pratap's defeat and disaster, because these type of boats (gurabs mainly) "were cramped for space and could not sail freely and in proper order in the Ichhamati which was not only narrow but full of bends of turns".<sup>1</sup>

Pratapaditya possessed as many as 1000 best war-vessels, besides a good many of other types of boats serving as auxiliary to the war-fleet in times of war. We know from Abdul Latif's account that in 1608. Pratap's fleet included 700 war-boats and when the Mughal commander Inayat Khan was sent against him, his son Udayaditya was reported to have faced the imperialists with 500 war-boats. Besides Pratap had a few war-boats at his each naval station to meet any emergency. It is difficult to ascertain how many more boats he had for collecting provisions and transporting his troops from one station to another. Besides the boats mentioned above, Pratap possessed a quite a fair number of swift moving 'sips' for maintaining communications between the different naval stations and 'jung' boats for transporting elephants, horses and other heavy articles.

The naval department was well-organised. The chief admiral was Augustus Pedro, a Portuguese, under whom a few other Portuguese admirals were employed although their names are not known. Mention is made of another Portuguese captain named Ruda who was taken prisoner and later employed in Pratap's service. In course of time Ruda became the chief admiral of the Jessore-fleet. He trained up Pratap's soldiers as mariners and naval fighters "with war-boats furnished with cannon". It was the duty of the admiral to look after

<sup>1</sup> Dacca Univ., *History of Bengal*, II, p. 267.

the comforts of the mariners and soldiers to “keep the powder dry” and to make proper reviews of the fleet from time to time. Each subordinate admiral was posted at each naval station subject to inspection by the Raja. All the havens and docks were under the supervision of Augustus Pedro.<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dudley, another Portuguese, was the chief of the ship-building department and under him Khwaja Abbas supervised the construction work at the docks. A number of officers were specially appointed in times of war for recruiting sailors and collecting provisions. Of course, these officers were not expected to take part in any naval engagement, only the ‘regulars’ were so employed. The sailors and soldiers employed temporarily were allowed a share of the booty besides a fixed lump-sum. Irrespective of class, colour and creed, Pratap employed in his navy the people living around the Bay of Bengal such as the ‘bagci’, ‘kaibarta’, ‘pod’, ‘beciya’ and other. He furnished his fleet with big and small cannon and the ruins of a great arsenal at Dhumghat bear evidence to this point. His fleet was sometimes supported by cavalry, the horses being imported from northern India. But Mughals far excelled Pratap in cavalry and artillery which constituted their mainstay in Bengal.

There was an elaborate arrangement for keeping watch on the movements of the enemy in the channels and rivulets and a regular link was always maintained with the naval stations from the docks by means of swift-moving ‘sips’ each in charge of an admiral or ‘mirbahar’. Besides the Portuguese, Muslims were also employed as sailors and captains. Of the latter, Shaikh Kamal and Shaikh Jamal played a conspicuous part in the war with the Mughals.<sup>2</sup>

Pratapaditya seems to have taken a keen interest in building ships and in their upkeep. The dockyard planted five miles to the north of Dhumghat (the capital) was the nerve-centre of Docks Pratap’s naval department. The pioneer of this dock was a Bengali artist, although his name is not known. After him, Frederick Dudley was made the chief of the staff, whose early career is not known. The dockyard was called ‘jahajghat’ where Dudley and his subordinates had their quarters. The ruin of the dock still exists. It is on the eastern bank of the Jamuna. There was a naval fort surrounded by a ditch adjacent to the Jahajghata dock, filled with mariners and gunners. To the north of the Jahajghata and on the south bank of Jamuna, lay the Dudley dock, so called after

<sup>1</sup> Latif’s *Diary*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Baharistan*, I, p. 127 ; *Mitra-Jashohar-Khulnar Itihas*, II, pp. 207-214.

the admiral Dudley. At the north-eastern mouth of a channel flowing down to the Jamuna from the east, a sub-channel was dug out and its water was made to fall into an artificial lake. Through this sub-channel, big war-vessels could move down to this lake for the purpose of re-filling and it was so done by completely stopping the flow of the water into the lake and then the closed water was completely dried up. A number of such artificial lakes were dug out not only for the purpose of repairing but also for building vessels. Each lake or ditch had a wooden door to admit water when necessary for setting afloat a newly-built vessel. A number of such docks were planted not only at Dudley and Jahajghata but also at other places like Araibanki, and Sagar islands.

Pratapaditya was a great strategist. On the two sides of his kingdom, north and south-eastern, the Raja raised a number of fortresses meant for land and naval fightings. To the north, Naval fortresses his main enemy were the Mughals and to his south, the Maghs and Feringhis. The most noted of all his naval stations was at Dhumghat. The Kamalpur fort was meant for the eastern enemy or the enemy advancing by way of the Bhairab and the Kabotaksh rivers. At the junction of the Arna and Sibsa the Raja raised another fortress of consequence called the Sibsa fort with a view to meet any eastern enemy. At the outset of his war with the Mughals, Pratapaditya built the fort of Jagaddal on the right bank of the Ganges. Salikha or Salka was another naval fort and we know from the *Baharistan* that the first naval battle between the Jessore-fleet and the imperial fleet was fought at Salka on the Jessore frontier. There is a difference of opinion regarding the exact location of this fort. According to some, it was near modern Howrah town. But most possibly Salka was located somewhere near the confluence of the Jamuna and Ichamati rivers. It was of great strategic importance, because a naval force stationed at the mouth of their confluence could have more easily arrested the advance of an enemy upon Jessore from the north trailing along the Bhairab-Jamuna or the Bhairab-Ichamati rivers.

To come to Jessore, the Bhairab was the principal water-route of the Mughals. Sailing along the bank of the Bhairab, if the enemy entered the Jamuna, no obstruction was immediately offered to them ; on the contrary, they were allowed to proceed unopposed. The same policy was followed if they preferred to advance along the Bhairab and

the Ichamati till they reached the confluence of the Jamuna and Ichamati. It was at this strategic point that the fortress of Salka was raised. Again, if the enemy, instead of entering the Jamuna, rather preferred to sail further south, they were opposed at Jagaddal first and then at Raigarh on the right bank of the Ganges. On the bank of the Ganges, Pratapaditya had another naval base at Malta (to the north of modern Canning). The main course of the Ganges flowing further southwards falls into the sea and this junction is called Sagardwip. Here Pratap had a fort and a collection of numerous war-boats. This naval base was meant for opposing the sea-rovers like the Maghs and the Feringhis. Pratap planted a chain of naval stations on his southern frontier. From Dhumghat to Malta, at every confluence of rivers and rivulets, the Raja raised a naval station and filled them all with war-boats and other war-equipments. The stations were not necessarily planted just at the junction but a few miles off it and the link was maintained by means of digging canals so that as soon as the news of the enemy's arrival came to be known, the war-boats were pushed down to the main confluence in series through these canals. The naval base of Araibanki was in the charge of Pedro. It was also called Feringhi fort. The entire water-route from Dhumghat to Malta, was kept under the supervision of the Portuguese admiral and well-guarded by the Feringhi sailors. At the mouth of the Bhagirathi, there was another base. It is said that Ruda, Pratap's admiral, routed the Mughals here in a naval engagement.<sup>1</sup>

Pratapaditya's naval force was in many respects superior to that of the imperialists, but it was not well supported by land force as in the case of the Mughals. Moreover, his war-boats were bigger in size and hence un-manageable in channel fightings. These two reasons contributed to his defeat in the war with the Mughals.

### *Mughal Navy in Bengal—Its Organisation and Development*

So far as Bengal is concerned, the water was a convenient medium for trade and commerce as well as for the transport of troops in those days. Although the sea-fight proper comes in incidentally, it has to be remembered that attempts were made by the belligerents in Bengal, in the period we are speaking of, to build war-vessels furnished with guns and magazine, to set up naval bases at strategic points to maintain a regular naval establishment.

<sup>1</sup> Mitra, *Op.cit.*, pp. 186-206.

The necessity for war-fleet and an organization for naval defence was even felt by the ancients in Bengal.

Throughout the Mughal period, Bengal witnessed a series of naval warfares between the Mughals and the Bengal landlords on the one hand and that again between these two sets of rivals and the foreigners like the Magh-Feringhis and the Ahoms on the other. Although battles were fought on land mainly, those on waters were no less significant. The maintenance of a naval force was considered essential in a country like Bengal whose peculiar-physical configuration, numerous rivers, rivulets and creeks rendered in those days the task of conquest and consolidation difficult. Like the Ahoms, the mainstay of the Maghs and Feringhis was the war-fleet without which it was absolutely impossible to traverse the numerous rivers and streams of South-eastern Bengal. Moreover prolonged rains and almost annual floods in the rivers made any campaign or transportation of merchandise absolutely impossible without a strong fleet or boats. The methods of warfare as applied in the mountainous region of northern India could not be profitably resorted to in Lower Bengal, the home of rivers. As Mirza Nathan writes : "In these days it is impossible to despatch cavalry and the infantry by land and there is no other means except requisitioning the fleet."<sup>1</sup>

Hence more attention was given by the Mughals pushing towards the eastern, south-eastern and north-eastern Bengal, as well as by the Ahoms and the Magh-Feringhis moving to the opposite directions, to the organisation and upkeep of powerful fleets and infantry.

The cavalry, the mainstay of the Mughals in other parts of the northern India, proved practically useless in the riverine tracts of Bengal. They were weak in war-boats, the only effective instrument of war in Bengal and weaker still in trained soldiers and sailors, and hence with the accession of Akbar and more particularly after the *dejure* annexation of Bengal to Akbar's empire in 1575, serious attempts were made to make good this deficiency. Of course, it should not be forgotten that even in the hey-day of the Mughals in Bengal despite their best efforts to make themselves equal with those of their rivals in naval strength, the Mughals had to depend on the war-boats of their allies and vassal zamindars in Bengal for most part of the period.

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<sup>1</sup>*Baharistan*, I, p. 148.



Prior to Akbar's reign, we hear little of any naval organisation or naval force of the Mughals, so to say, in Bengal. The beginning of Mughal naval organisation in Bengal Of course, both Babur and Humayun should be regarded as pioneers of the Mughal navy which received a proper attention from the succeeding emperors of Delhi.

With the extension of the Mughal frontiers to the eastern province by the second half of the 16th century and the consequent hostilities with the local rulers who were strong in naval force, it became incumbent upon the Mughal government to organize a naval force. Besides, a department of the admiralty was considered very useful by Akbar for the benefit of the country in general as it furnished means of obtaining things of value, provided for agriculture and the emperor's household. Hence Akbar's government gave a great impetus to the naval department and as a matter of fact, an imperial naval establishment was founded and maintained in Bengal, the home of Indian ship-building. The department became known as 'Nawara' in the time of Islam Khan's viceroyalty (1608-1613).

The Mughal flotilla, at the time it was established by Akbar, consisted of upwards of 3000 vessels of different sizes, but it was afterwards reduced to 768 vessels, besides a number of vessels were furnished by the vassal allies and the zamindars. The flotilla was mainly stationed at Dacca as its headquarters and under the jurisdiction of the admiralty of Dacca was placed the whole coast from Murdelghat near the confluence of the Damodar and the Rupnarayan to the the coast of Ballasore on the west and the whole of Bharahmaputra and the Meghna coasts in the east to guard against the incursions of the Maghs and the Feringhis. Understandably, these defence measures involved huge expenses. "In fact", writes Grant, "the ordinary established rental of the whole country was then almost absorbed, actually or fraudulently in jagirs in protecting the sea coasts from the ravages of the Arakanese aided by the Portuguese."<sup>1</sup> The flotilla was maintained not only for defence but also for the purpose of offence. A huge number of boats had to be built, a number of personnel to be impressed and hence huge expenses had to be incurred.

Raja Man Singh, as viceroy of Bengal, considerably increased the

<sup>1</sup> Grant's *Analysis*, etc., p. 181.

revenue of Bengal by conquering the maritime region of Bhati (lower Bengal) near the mouth of the Ganges and by levying a tribute from Raja Lakshminarayan of Kuch Bihar. This did not, however, increase the public income, for the gains achieved were absorbed in maintaining a huge flotilla. It was during Man Singh's viceroyalty that we find a remarkable outburst of naval activity in eastern Bengal in which the Mughals and the independent chiefs of Bengal took equal share.

Regarding the details relating to the financial aspect of the naval establishment, we have to refer to the abstract of the 'Ausil Toomer Jumma' (original established revenue) of Bengal as settled about the year 1582 by Raja Todar Mal. The whole expense of maintaining 768 armed cruisers and other boats stationed at Dacca including the wages of 923 Portuguese sailors "was estimated at Rs. 29,282 with which constructing new vessels and repairing the old, amounted annually to Rs. 8,43,452 levied altogether from 112 entire or broken parganas, chiefly in the chakla of Jahangirnagar and composed a great part of the richest, most productive lands of the great province...." On this account, inconsiderable amount was also raised from Sylhet. The jagirs that were assigned in the Dacca district for the support of the civil and military establishments were computed to comprise one-third of its whole extent.

Besides the vessels built and maintained by the Mughals, the zamindars of the province also furnished them boats when called upon to do so and in return, they were assigned lands under the head 'omleh Nawara'. For the support of the Nawara, another source of revenue was derived from a tax called 'mi-baree' levied on building of boats varying from rupee one to four according to the size. The same rates were realised from all the boats arriving at or leaving the naval headquarters "whose crew were not the residents of the district". Besides at the ports of unloading under Mughal jurisdiction, customs were realised from the European merchants on the arrival of their ships laden with merchandise.

The emperor impressed the Portuguese "either from Goa or from the colonies of that nation settled about the mouth of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra", in the naval establishment as craftsmen and artillerymen and thus set the precedent of appointing Europeans which was followed by his successors.

Like his father, Akbar had a special fancy for floating markets and floating gardens. During his march upon Bengal in 1574, two large

Europeans in the  
Mughal navy

vessels were appropriated for the residence of the emperor himself and were followed by a great fleet, conveying the high officers with equipment and baggage of every kind. Even "gardens such as clever craftsmen could not make on land" were constructed on some of the boats.<sup>1</sup> Kasim Khan was the emperor's chief engineer, skilled in constructing bridges of boats for the passage of the imperial army. Besides the vessels of the Nawara and the emperor's personal boats, two state-barges for the use of the subahdars were stationed at Dacca. The subahdars were under obligation to send two magnificent vessels annually to the emperor at Agra.

The emperor's personal boat bore a special dignity and respect and it was commanded that the provincial governors should show a befitting respect and perform an obeisance to it whenever they happened to meet it. For instance, Murshid Kuli Khan's sense of respect for the emperor's barge was so deep that "he would not sit down in a royal boat and when in the rainy season, the emperor's boat came from Jahangirnagar for an exhibition, he went out (from Murshidabad) to meet it and turning his face towards the seat the emperor used to occupy, made his obeisance, presented his 'nazars' and kissed the deck of the state-boat."<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that the rules and regulations as framed by Akbar's government were not rigid. The working of the naval department as well as the rules relating to the officers and the sailors engaged and their wages underwent alterations during the reigns of the succeeding emperors.

Of the emperors following Akbar, Aurangzeb took keen interest in maintaining the Nawara both in the western and eastern India.

Jahangir and Shah Jahan do not appear to have taken such active interest as was expected of them. Again, of the Mughal viceroys in Bengal after Islam Khan, only Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan are found to have been alive to the necessity of organising and strengthening the naval force in Bengal and it is under them that the Mughal Nawara is seen at its best.

Of course, the maintenance of the flotilla in Bengal was the work more of the provincial governors than that of the emperors, because ultimately they were charged with the responsibilities of preserving peace and security within the province, fighting the enemies and

<sup>1</sup> *Akbarnama*, III, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions*, etc., p. 113.

extending the frontiers. So far as the Mughal navy in Bengal is concerned, neither Jahangir nor Shah Jahan exerted themselves to make it a real force, on the contrary, the organisation after Islam Khan's viceroyalty showed signs of declining to a considerable degree till Aurangzeb and his capable viceroys did their utmost to revive it and make it capable for defensive and offensive purposes.

Like other departments of the imperial government, the naval department was placed in charge of an imperial officer of integrity and having sufficient knowledge of naval warfare, called 'mir-bahar'. Jahangir appointed Ihtiman Khan as the 'mir-bahar' of the imperial Nawara. Although he was the chief admiral, he was subject to the command of the viceroy and, as a matter of fact, no naval warfare could be undertaken without the latter's order. Sometimes the land army was placed at the command of the 'mir-bahar'. The latter was to recruit boatmen and crew and provide other equipments necessary for naval campaigns. It was the duty of the diwan to settle the wages of the boatmen, sailors and personnel engaged in the department. Along with these officers are mentioned captains, stewards and 'sardars'. The 'sardars' were to recruit sailors and other labourers in times of campaigns. Besides the imperial fleet in charge of the chief admiral, the viceroy, other imperial officers and the vassal zamindars had their personal boats to be used in times of naval war. Although the personnel of these boats were the personal employees of the officers and the zamindars, in times of engagements they were placed at the command of the 'mir-bahar' of the imperial Nawara and normally the viceroy was not expected to engage them without the 'mir-bahar's' approval. The boats were arranged into groups, each placed in charge of superintendents or captains and 'mir-samana' under the direct control of the chief admiral. The boats of the zamindars' fleet were likewise grouped according to their respective strength and placed in charge of the imperial superintendents. The latter were probably deputed to prevent desertion of the zamindars' boats in times of engagements. Besides the superintendents, commanders were also appointed over the zamindars' fleet. Of course, in most cases, they were appointed from amongst the zamindars themselves who and none else had the real control over their sailors and crew.

It was the duty of the admirals of the fleet, whether imperial, officers' or zamindars', to collect carpenters, blacksmiths and other labourers for the repair of the boats in case of damage. Sufficient quantities of gun-powder, bundles of straw, bamboo-spikes and other

materials were always kept ready on the boats for the purpose of constructing bridges, mud-forts and barricades.

The imperial naval army also included elephants which were carried on boats. And for this purpose two or more boats were tied together with a platform over them which was called 'mands'. To carry them, 'bi.as', i.e. a kind of raft made of wood and plaintain trees tied together, called 'bir' were also used. There are also references to 'gondclas' to carry men and horses.

In times of naval war, temporary bridges were often constructed for transporting infantry, serving as an auxiliary to the naval army as well as cavalry, elephants and other heavy loads. Any river, if unfordable for the infantry men, was crossed by a temporary bridge of boats. The 'mir-bahar' himself was to supervise the construction work and to supply flat-bottomed boats for the purpose.<sup>1</sup> It seems that the purely native system of making a bridge of boats suffered from one great defect. The natives made no use of grapnels and followed the tedious mode of driving stakes into the riverbed instead. As a result, the bridge was weak and what might have been done in one day, it took 8 or 10 days to complete the work.<sup>2</sup>

We find two modes of payment to the persons employed in the naval establishment, viz. assignments of lands and cash payments. The officers were granted jagirs. Here a distinction was made between the officers' personal jagirs and those granted for the maintenance of the soldiers or for such specific purposes as the upkeep of the fleet. Mirza Nathan writes : "Islam Khan was assigned as much of the territories of Ramchandra (of Bakla) to him as was necessary for the maintenance of his fleet, the rest was given to the 'kroris' and jagirdars." It should be noted that the chief admiral, being in charge of the imperial fleet, was assigned land. Besides, as he was to maintain his personal boats to be pressed into the imperial service, further assignments were made to him.

As regards the vassal zamindars, like the Raja of Chandradwip and the Tlakurdas of Banaripara who helped the Mughals in the work of conquest and consolidation, were assigned two kinds of rent-free lands called Nawara and Hissajat. The Nawara lands were granted in order to enable the zamindars to contribute boats and sailors during the war with the Maghs and the Feringhis. The Hissajat lands were

<sup>1</sup> Elliot, VI, p. 363; Bernier, *Voyages*, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup> *Asiatic Miscell.*, I, p. 419.

granted as reward for their personal participation in such campaigns. But all the zamindars were not necessarily granted Nawara lands, and they had to contribute boats and men when such occasion demanded and the expenses had to be borne by themselves.

So far as the boat men, crew and other menials are concerned, we come across a number of arrangements for their payments. Here again, a distinction has to be made between those employed on a permanent basis, directly under the chief admiral and those recruited temporarily according to urgency of the situation. Sometimes lands under the head 'Nawara' jagir were assigned to them for their maintenance. Generally a plot of land was divided into 'taluks' and each such division was assigned to each boatman and artificer of the fleet.<sup>1</sup> Again in the Ain,<sup>2</sup> the rates of payment in cash to the workers employed are given which, of course, were not strictly followed.<sup>3</sup> Generally the diwan was to settle the wages of the sailors, crew and artificers of the fleet.

As has been already noted, in times of war 'sardars' were appointed to recruit the menials. For the wages of the latter, the imperial government entered into contracts with the 'sardars' acting as agents who were paid in lump sum to be distributed amongst the workers and in certain cases these poor menials were defrauded by these agents.

The Mughal navy is seen at its best during the viceroyalty of Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan who introduced certain new elements in the organisation to make it a 'real force' in the eastern waters as Aurangzeb desired, although the emperor himself failed to make it so in the western waters.

The Mughal naval force showed signs of declining since the closing years of Jahangir's reign till Aurangzeb came to the throne when attempts were made afresh by his viceroys Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan to revive it. The 'scorched-earth' policy of Prince Shuja left only a few and rotten boats of Bengal constituting the Nawara. The negligence and tortuous policy of Shuja's officials destroyed the Nawara parganas yielding 14 lakhs of rupees annually and this loss made it almost impossible to maintain a large number of boats. The most pressing problem at that time was to safeguard the coastal regions from

<sup>1</sup> Taylor, *Topography*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Ain-i-Akbari*, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> Irvine, *Army of the Indian Mughals*, p. 174.

the ravages of Maghs and the Feringhis. To fight them with a strong fleet was well-nigh impossible. Hence Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan had to undertake the task of defending the coastal region, re-building the flotilla, financing their maintenance and extending the Mughal frontiers.

Mir Jumla's (1660-63) first concern in Bengal was to build new vessels and repair the old ones. And to do this he engaged European shipwrights and European mariners. Glanius (a Dutch sailor) says : "...we went on board one of the vessels belonging to the Nawab (Mir Jumla) where we found four Englishmen, few Portuguese and two men of our company".<sup>1</sup> A good many of Mir Jumla's officers were Portuguese and "the general", writes Glanius, "had so good an opinion of the Christians that if a Moor could speak but a little of that language, he commonly preferred him to some considerable office." Mir Jumla utilised the services of the Europeans for constructing his war-vessels and paid them handsomely. But in certain cases we find him employing them forcibly without paying anything. He pressed the Dutch, Portuguese and English to lend him their vessels to reconquer Hijli. It is admitted by the English factors that the assistance of the Dutch mariners and their boats made this enterprise a grand success. Thomas Pratt, an Englishman "high in favour with Mir Jumla" was employed by the viceroy in building boats and making ammunition for river fighting.<sup>2</sup>

Besides improving the quality of the boats, Mir Jumla took an equal interest in protecting the coastal region by raising a number of forts about the confluence of the Lakhiya and the Ichamati rivers and constructing several good military roads and bridges in the vicinity of Dacca.

Doubtless, the imperial Nawara under Mir Jumla was in a progressive state and as many as 323 boats he employed in his Assam campaign. Besides, several other boats laden with provisions and war ammunition were always kept ready at the headquarters to be employed in times of emergency.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of his best efforts, Mir Jumla could not bring any lasting improvement. With a view to reorganising the Nawara, he abolished the old system, but before he could start a new one and make it permanent, he had to set out on the fatal Assam campaign. Many

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Glanius, *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> *Manucci*, II, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Bengal—Past and Present*, 1925.

naval officers and crew perished in the course of the war and the Nawara suffered damage beyond repair.

The decline of the naval power of the imperialists had serious repercussion on the security of the province and consequently aggravated the menace of the sea-rovers. Hence upon his arrival in Bengal, Shaista Khan had to face an unhappy situation. But he was equal to the occasion and employed his whole time and energy in reviving the naval power of the imperial government and to his credit it should be admitted that his energy and persistence overcame every obstacle.

His first concern was to have a suitable shipyard for constructing new vessels and repairing the old one. Dacca served the purpose best and accordingly it was turned into a great and busy shipyard. In the great dockyards that lined the channel passing through the city of Dacca, in the quarters known as Tanti Bazar, began brisk activities for building boats on a large scale. As timber and shipwrights were required for the purpose, 'baliffs' were sent with parwanas to all directions to fetch timber and carpenters from every 'mauja' of the province and to bring them to Dacca. Besides turning the city into a great dockyard, the viceroy ordered as many boats as possible to be built at the ports of Hughli, Balasore, Murang, Cailmory, Jessore and Karibari and ordered them, when finished, to be sent to Dacca. From his vigorous exertions and busy activities, it seems that he put the entire province on war-footing and it is to be admitted that he left no stone unturned to make the Nawara a real force to fight the enemies. "Not for a moment," writes Talish, "did he forget to mature plans for assembling the crew, providing their rations and needments and collecting the materials for ship-building and shipwrights", and in a short time about 300 vessels were built, ready in war-trim and employed them against the Feringhi pirates of Chaittagong.<sup>1</sup> At Lalbagh, he built a large red-brick fort to command the river which once washed its south-face."<sup>2</sup>

Expert officers were chosen for higher posts. Hakim Muhammad Hussain, "an old, able, learned, trustworthy and virtuous servant of the Nawab" was appointed head of the ship-building department. Qazi Samu was made the superintendent of the dockyard, Kishore Das "a well-informed and experienced clerk" was entrusted with the

<sup>1</sup> Sarkar, *Studies*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Early Annals*, I, p. 81.



duty of supervising the Nawara pargana and the stipend of the jagirs assigned to the naval officers and others. Abu Hussain was appointed chief admiral.

Besides the natives, Shaista Khan also employed the English, Dutch and Portuguese in the navy and we find him often demanding of them their vessels. A letter from Madras to Hughli dated October 8, 1664 contains the following passage upon the subject. The letter runs, "you say, there is an absolute necessity to furnish the Nawab with a 'sloope' and men and it will be a great furtherence to our masters' business . . . you must endeavour to get men and 'sloope' to assist him (the viceroy) . . . but he must allow the charges of 'sloope' and men."<sup>1</sup> By threats and allurements, Shaista Khan also succeeded in effecting a desertion of a large number of Portuguese sailors and soldiers from the side of the Arrakan king. Lands were assigned for their settlement near Dacca and a monthly stipend of Rs. 500 was settled on the Portuguese captain from the imperial treasury.<sup>2</sup>

According to Bowrey, Shaista Khan imposed a sort of ship-money on the mercantile community to build up the naval power of the subah both for defensive and offensive purposes. Bowrey also writes that the viceroy sent his 'paiks' to the merchants at Hughli, Jessore, Pipli and Ballasore for a ship or two in each respective place of 400, 500 or 600 tonnage to be sent to Dacca and also 10, 20 or 30 'jalias' to attend them.

Shaista Khan not only revived the flotilla afresh but also inspired the demoralised Bergali sailors and crew into a fighting mood and at last succeeded in crushing the naval power of the Maghs and Feringhis in 1666. As a matter of fact, it was by a powerful fleet that Shaista Khan at last succeeded in conquering Chittagong.

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<sup>1</sup> *English Factory Records, II*, 1661-64, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> Sarkar, *Studies*, p. 130.

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